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ISSUE 141 · DECEMBER 2006

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ISSUE #141 DECEMBER 2006 VOLUME 20, NO 12

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SAVAGE TIDE ADVENTURE PATH

16 THE SEA WYVERN'S WAKE
Richard Pett
It's time to bid farewell to the city of Sasserine as the PCs board the *Sea Wyvern* for a 3,000-mile voyage south into the uncharted waters of the Vohoun Ocean. Their destination: the Isle of Dread. A Savage Tide Adventure Path scenario for 5th-level characters.

ADVENTURES

50 SWORDS OF DRAGONSLAKE
Nicolas Logue
Scandal has struck the theater circuit of the city of Talantier! Ancient betrayal, murderous plots, and a plethora of suspects plague the PCs as they race to unravel the mystery before its bloody conclusion plays out on the stage. A D&D adventure for 12th-level characters.

74 VLINDARIAN'S VAULT
Johnathan M. Richards
A missing dragon leads the PCs to a treasure vault hidden deep in the Elemental Plane of Fire, a vault operated by an insane beholder and its fanatical cultists. A D&D adventure for 18th-level characters.

ON THE COVER

Roberto Campus brings us the legendary beholder, guaranteed to strike terror into the hearts of D&D players everywhere.

CARTOONS

48 The Portent
72 Mt. Zogon
96 Downer

COLUMNS

8 Editorial
10 Prison Mail
86 Gamer Guide
88 Dungeoncraft
98 Map of Mystery

CAMPAIGN WORKBOOK

92 The City
94 Wandering Monster

"With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
The southward aye we fled."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
"The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner"

DUNGEON ADVENTURE PLAYER REWARDS!

Take advantage of the RPGA's Player Rewards program by scoring points with the adventures from this issue of *Dungeon*! Each adventure is worth 2 D&D Player Rewards points, and remains active until 1/31/07.

RPGA NETWORK

Drop by rpga.com for more details, and use the following adventure codes:
The Sea Wyvern's Wake (141SW1DN)
Swords of Dragonslake (141SD1DN)
Vlindarian's Vault (141VV1DN)

THANKS FOR THE MONSTERS, DAD!

It seems fitting that the movie that started my lifelong interest in all things monster was subtitled "King of the Monsters." I first saw the American revision of *Godzilla* at the impressionable age of "way before 10," when my dad let me stay up to 11:30 at night one Saturday to watch an episode of the late-night monster movie show, "Creature Features." It became the regular Saturday night thing, with each week bringing some new form of menace into my mind—giant tarantulas, mole people, mushroom people, smog monsters, creeping flesh, terrors from beyond space, monsters that challenged the world, and all their rubber-suited cousins became my obsession. During the week, when the next installment of "Creature Features" felt like it was years away, I often drew eight boxes on a blank piece of paper and brought it to my dad with a request: "Draw me some monsters!" And from there, further denizens were added to my terratic repertoire: abalone-eating amoebas, house-eating crabs, bug-eyed dragons. Sometimes I'd put in a request, but they'd usually backfire on me—my request for a "sea monster" became a fanged and angry-eyed letter "C," and the baby monster I wanted to see ended up being an enormous baby using the Empire State Building as a pacifier.

With the advent of D&D, an amazing new source of monsters fell into my hands. For many years, the old *Monster Manual* was my favorite book: 126 pages of imagination fuel. And when I bought my first adventure module (Q1: *Queen of the Demonweb Pits*), Lo! Even these things had new monsters in them! You could never tell what you were going to get, because those old adventures were shrinkwrapped. As soon as I tore into a new purchase, I would invariably head right to the end to see what new horrors had arrived. Sometimes I hit the jackpot, as in the case of *Dwellers of the Forbidden City* (which introduced us to classics like the aboleth and the yuan-ti). Other times, I felt ripped off (some of those old adventures didn't even have ONE new monster!) or disoriented (such as when the adventure *Baltron's Beacon* placed the new monsters at the START of the adventure—heresy!).

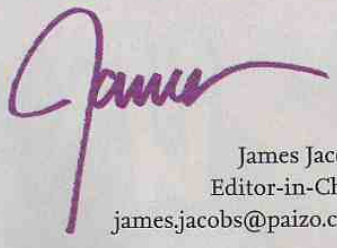
All of which is a roundabout way of saying you can expect to see new monsters in every issue of DUNGEON as long as I'm in charge. In fact, in this very issue, we're debuting a new section of the campaign workbook: the Wandering Monster. Just as Critical Threats introduce a new NPC for you to vex your players, Wandering Monsters are drag-and-drop critters you can fit into any campaign world. Sometimes they'll be brand-new critters, like this month's living shipwreck. Others will be updates of old favorites (I'm pretty sure there's a slithering tracker lurking in the office here somewhere...).

And as long as I can keep my dad at bay, I promise: no man-eating letters or building-sucking babies.

Changing of the Guard

Before I wander off for the month, I've actually got an announcement. This issue marks Monte Cook's last installment of Dungeoncraft for the foreseeable future—after nearly 30 issues of excellent advice, he'll be handing over the column's controls to another PLANESCAPE alumnist. Starting with issue #143, Dungeoncraft will be in the capable hands of Wolfgang Baur.

So, on behalf of the DUNGEON staff and DMs everywhere, thanks for the good times, Monte, and good luck on your next adventure!



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Check out the *Dungeon* messageboards at paizo.com/dungeon

DUNGEON #138

Issue #138 of *Dungeon* marked the 20th anniversary of the magazine, and to celebrate, we fattened it up to a mega-sized 130-page issue packed with goodness recalling the previous 137 issues.

First, we decided to update one of the magazine's most notorious adventures. Voted #1 by our panel of expert game designers back in issue #116, this new version of "The Mud Sorcerer's Tomb" (first printed in *Dungeon* #37) was updated to the latest edition of the rules and reillustrated for a taste of some good old-fashioned mayhem.

Second, we printed a couple of sequels to popular adventues of the past. Johnathan Richards brought us "Challenge of Champions VI," and Richard Pett sent us back to the Styes with "The Weavers."

Finally, Amber E. Scott took us up on the challenge to write up the adventure that our audience came up with during our "Writing for *Dungeon*" seminar at Gen Con 2005, sending us down into the sewers to fight some cat-training wererats.

Back issues of *Dungeon* #138 are available at paizo.com.

Prison Mail

Challenging Questions

I've been meaning to write in for some time, so expect a number of disconnected opinions...

First off, Downer is a tremendous addition to the magazine and something I look forward to as much as the solid adventures I get each month. The recent Critical Threat featuring Downer was outstanding; I'd like to see all of the main characters from that comic featured likewise. Big kudos to Kyle for the contribution he is making to the magazine and the game in general.

Second, I'd like to see an index of adventures, preferably as a printable online supplement.

Third, the latest round of "Challenge of Champions" reminds me of one of the most problematic aspects of player-character differentiation. The puzzles of "Challenge of Champions" are clearly designed to challenge the imagination and problem-solving skills of players. Many of the enjoyable characters I've played wouldn't even have the appropriate frame of reference to begin one of Mr. Richards' scenarios. While they are noteworthy products, they don't seem playable without meta-gaming. Can you imagine any barbarian, most sorcerers, and a host of other non-analytical characters taking on the Challenge?

Finally, the Savage Tide looks to continue *Dungeon*'s greatest accomplishment to date: the Adventure Paths. I love the mix of Adventure Path and plug-in adventures, and the high-quality/low-quantity extras at the conclusion of each issue. Dungeoncraft and Maps of Mystery are particularly deserving of praise, along with the thoughtful art selection and excellent work of the artists and cartographers themselves. Keep up the great work!

Jeff
Via Email

I think you've hit the nail on the head with your observation about the "Challenge of Champions" adventures. It's true—you can actually play a "Challenge of Champions" adventure even if everyone in the group leaves their character sheets at home.

In previous editions of D&D, a character's skills were much less defined than they are in 3rd Edition. The original "Challenge of Champions" didn't have to concern itself with the disconnect between what a player knew and what his character knew, since there wasn't a strong mechanic for skills in the game yet. With 3rd Edition, I think that the "niche" occupied by these adventures has grown even smaller.

Still, it can be fun to send the PCs on adventures where the players have to use their heads, and the "Challenge of Champions" adventures certainly accomplish this goal.

Index? Yes, Please!

I think an index of *Dungeon* adventures is a great idea. I don't think it's necessary to use up magazine space for it, though. I think it would be great just to be available as a free download from the website.

NEXT MONTH IN DUNGEON

MASQUE OF DREAMS

by B. Matthew Conklin III

A masquerade ball at a remote desert oasis turns tragic when the party is crashed by goblin minions of a priestess of Zargon. Can the PCs rescue the kidnapped guests before they vanish into the desert, the latest victims of the Lost City of the Valley of Death? A D&D adventure for 1st-level characters.

HERE THERE BE MONSTERS

by Jason Bulmahn

Shipwrecked on the Isle of Dread! Faced with a dangerous overland journey across one of the tropics' most notorious isles, the PCs must escort a band of ragged castaways through monster-infested jungles, gargoyle-haunted cliffs, and dangerous underground passes in order to reach the safety promised by the colony of Farshore on the isle's southern tip. A Savage Tide Adventure Path scenario for 7th-level characters.

BRIGHT MOUNTAIN KING

by Caine Chandler

A nefarous villain's plan to ruin a dwarven nation's economy draws the PCs into the perilous depths of an ancient dwarven tomb. Yet does achieving their goal in the tomb only play into their enemy's hands? A D&D adventure for 16th-level characters.

That would also allow you to update it more regularly.

Hans Cummings
Via Email

Index? Me too!

First off, congratulations to James on the editor-in-chief position. I'm really looking forward to Savage Tide and what direction you may take the magazine in the coming years.

I'm writing to respond to the "Dungeon Life List" letter in this month's DUNGEON, and your response concerning the DUNGEON index.

Why not just throw that extra content on the website? Sure, you have the up front cost/time of assembling the list (something several people on the web have already started for you), but updating it is a breeze, takes up no valuable magazine real estate, and allows for our audience to post reviews/comments of individual adventures.

I know you guys are busy, and that may be more of a factor than how much of the magazine would be taken up with a full index, but I really think our audience would be happier with it on the web. I know I would.

Note: I say 'our audience' because I feel like I belong in the DUNGEON family. I've been with you guys since issue 1, and as I've said in previous letters, I don't think it's ever been better. Good luck in the new job, and a tearful goodbye to Erik.

Paul Wolfe
Austin, Texas

We had a flood of responses to my question about the value of an index of DUNGEON *adventures, and nearly all of them were pro-index. So I guess that means we'd better get moving on it! At this point, I think it's got a better chance seeing life as an online resource rather than in print in the magazine. Keep an eye out at paizo.com for future developments on this front.*

Let the Past Stay Buried

I'm afraid I have to take issue with the idea that "The Mud Sorcerer's Tomb" (DUNGEON #138) is an "old gem" full of "cunning traps," as Mr. Mona wrote in his editorial. The adventure is old, yes, but it represents some of the worst tropes of the old days—ones that I thought we had put behind us.

Rather than fairly challenging high-level adventurers, "The Mud Sorcerer's Tomb" resorts to arbitrary fiat to tilt the playing field decidedly in its own favor. Page 60 contains a table of divination spells that either "automatically fail" or have their effect seriously constrained, and the DM is advised that "other divination spells should have their effectiveness reduced as appropriate."

Appropriate to what? To days gone by when an adversarial DM took every opportunity to screw the players out of using their PCs' hard-earned abilities? That's not right. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* advises (page 46) that "preempting the characters' abilities in an adventure is a hallmark of bad structure." The book specifically states, "Use the PCs' abilities to allow them to have more interesting encounters..."

The *Dungeon Master's Guide* also specifically notes that an adventure designer should "keep divination magic in mind... Don't deny the spells their potency."

"The Mud Sorcerer's Tomb" would be a better designed and more interesting adventure if it contained areas that required the PCs to use their high-level abilities: obscure riddles that only made sense when researched with *legend lore* or similar spells, extradimensional spaces that can only be reached by *plane shift*, sealed rooms deep within the bedrock the require teleportation to enter, and so forth.

As DUNGEON heads into its 21st year, here's hoping we won't see any more adventures that promote player frustration by wantonly constraining their PCs.

Joshua Randall
Cleveland, OH

It's interestng to note that, taking the advice on page 46 of the Dungeon Master's Guide, *the "Challenge of Champions" adventures are bad adventures as well, since the central conceit of these adventures is that the characters aren't allowed to use their tricks. Yet somehow, this series of adventures remains quite popular, as do old-school adventures like "The Mud Sorcerer's Tomb." Despite the limitations they place on characters, adventures like these can be a lot of fun. Check out the old classic* Queen of the Spiders—*once you get to the Abyss at the*

NEXT MONTH IN DRAGON

CORE BELIEFS: WEE JAS

by Sean K Reynolds

Embrace the ways of Wee Jas and revel in the deepest mysteries of existence. Through her and her faith lies the path to magics untold, unearthly beauty, and ultimate death.

LEGACIES OF THE ANCIENTS

by Eric L. Boyd

More planetouched races inhabit the Forgotten Realms than just aasimar, tieflings, and the elemental genasi. Four new planar-blooded races: the azerblood, celadrin, d'hin'ni, and worghest.

MAGICAL POLLUTION

by Hal Maclean

Some arcane effects even *dispel magic* can't clean up.

CREATURES OF CORRUPTION

by Jake Manley

Discover what is spawned when magic goes awry.

PLUS!

Sorcerers of EBERRON, The Ecology of the Clockwork Horror, Class Acts, First Watch, Sage Advice, Savage Tidings, comics (including Order of the Stick), and more!

end of that adventure, there are pages and pages of spells and abilities that simply don't work (or work quite differently). Yet the adventure was still chosen as the #1 D&D adventure of all time by a panel of experts back in DUNGEON *#116.*

That said, I do agree with you, Joshua. Working with rather than against divinations and other "game-breaking" character abilities is certainly a hallmark of a good adventure, and you can be sure it's something we look for in submissions to this magazine.

Time Is On My Side...

I wrote the following on an online forum, but it occurred to me that instead of simply complaining about something I consider annoying, I'd raise the issue with one of my favorite sources of adventures: DUNGEON.

The original poster was asking about alternative forms of progressions for characters, and specifically mentioned the problem some folks have with the rapidity of advancement under the 3.5 rules. I responded:

The only problem I have with the rapid advancement in 3.5 is the emphasis on advancing so quickly in "game time." In other words, it doesn't bother me that players gain a level every two or three sessions (sometimes faster during the first three levels), but it bothers me that a 16-year-old novice fighter becomes a 16-year-old supreme warrior because most campaigns (including published campaigns) just don't allow for downtime.

Take the adventure paths in DUNGEON, for instance. I love the concept of these, but in the latest issue Erik mentions that it'll take a "full year" for the characters to make their way through the Savage Tide Adventure Path. Really? A whole year? So my fighter will be 17 years old by the time he's 20th level? Ugh.

Is it so hard to envision campaigns in which the PCs adventure to 3rd or 4th level, then settle down for a few years, then adventure again when the threat rears its head again, then go through more down time, and so on? This opens up so many interesting story possibilities. Imagine one interval of downtime being the PCs languishing in a gaol. How would that change the characters? It would allow the background world—not just the parts of the world immediately accessible to the PCs—to go through real change. Instead of inventing legends from the past for PCs to hear about, PCs can become legends for future PCs to hear about.

Obviously, when creating a campaign from scratch, I, like any DM, am free to indulge in this type of story-telling. Unfortunately, I work for a living, and try to maintain a girlfriend and sad semblance of a social life outside of gaming, so I really have very little choice but to use published adventures. And published adventures seem positively allergic to this kind of time-passage. Thanks for reading.

Jeff Wilder
Via Email

Savage Tide is going to be the longest Adventure Path yet, as far as "game time passed" is concerned. Heck; the third adventure in the campaign covers, at minimum, 3 months of time. The campaign also assumes that the PCs will be taking more downtime between adventures than Age of Worms assumed, and certainly more than Shackled City assumed.

That being said, I don't think it's at all unbelievable to have an entire campaign go from 1st to 20th level in the span of a single game year (or less), and I doubt the total amount of time that'll pass during the Savage Tide Adventure Path will be more than a couple years, at most. Simply put: downtime is boring. The best way to handle it is via email, really. If something is exciting enough to require time spent roleplaying, it should end in experience points (be they gained through combat, story award, or whatever).

Take The Lord of the Rings *as an example. At the start of that storyline, you have some low-level characters whose greatest worry is what might happen if they miss second breakfast. By the time the campaign is over, they've fought witch kings, battled ancient spiders, and saved the world. All in the span of about a year.*

If it's good enough for Tolkien, I suppose it's good enough for D&D!

Epic Level Outrage

In issue #138 a reader wrote in asking about an epic adventure path, to which you replied, "No one is interested epic adventures." To that I would ask, why do you think that is?

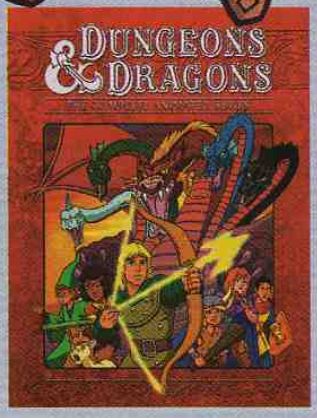
Personally I think it is because Wizards of the Coast stopped supporting epic characters ever since 3.5 came out. The

D&D DVD! (FOR FREE)

BY KYLE HUNTER

Don't you wish you could be one of those unfortunate kids sucked into a fantasy world by a roller coaster? Or that you had a reference against which you could compare your Uni the unicorn impersonation? Well, this month, BCI Eclipse and *Dungeon* are ready to grant your wishes. One of our lucky readers can win a copy of the new Dungeons & Dragons cartoon DVD boxed set, containing the entire run of the show.

How? Just send an email with the subject line "D&D Cartoon Contest" to **contest@paizo.com** by December 15th. We'll announce the winner in our March issue, #144, and send off the DVDs to one randomly selected participant. So, just give us a yell and take your chance to finally get the cartoon DVDs you've been waiting two decades to own!



original 3.0 epic rules were completely broken and nonsensical. Instead of raising the cost of all epic magic items by ten, they could have kept a more realistic monetary system and had the epic magic items bond to only epic characters, eliminating the fear that non-epic characters would acquire epic items. The epic spells are insane. Everything is just nuts. It is not like the good old days of AD&D when a 21st-level wizard was only 1 hit point and a few extra spells per day different than his 20th-level counterpart.

If WotC were to fix the many problems with the *Epic Level Handbook* and make it playable for 3.5, you would see more people wanting to play high level campaigns. With the lack of a desire to correct a mistake on the part of WotC, I think it falls to you and your sister magazine *Dragon* to fix the problem. How do you do this might you ask? Properly prepared articles I say.

In lieu of WotC fixing the problem, *Dragon* should have articles, one a month, fixing the many problems with the epic progression. Then, after a year of fixing the problems, an adventure every other or every third magazine in *Dungeon*.

It is not that people are not willing to play epic adventures, it is that they don't know how because the rules for it are completely broken.

Also, you hinted that you wanted some more epic adventures but only wanted to print one a year. The problem is that you only want to print one a year. What if you get 10 really good epic adventures? Would you then be covered for the next ten years? The other problem is as I stated above. It is hard to make an offical epic adventure without house rules because the system is no longer supported and the current rules make it all but impossible. I, for one, have a great idea for not only an epic adventure, but also an epic adventure path. The two things that prevent me from submitting it are that you are not looking for an epic adventure path and I wouldn't begin to know how to make it without over-challenging the PCs with the current broken rules.

Now, if I could use the house rules I created to make the epic rules more playable, that would be a different story alltogether.

C. E. Rocco
Via Email

Actually, epic level play is more supported in 3.5, since it's covered in the core rules on pages 206–210 of the Dungeon Master's Guide. *Wizards of the Coast has gone on to support epic content fairly regularly, adding new epic feats in books like* Complete Warrior, *new epic spells in books like* Stormwrack, *and new epic monsters and NPCs in many of their* Forgotten Realms *products.*

No, I suspect the primary reason that epic level play isn't more popular has less to do with WotC conspiracies and more to do with the simple fact that the game gets too complicated at high level. Market research shows that the average campaign lasts only six months. Further, the most popular levels to play D&D fall squarely in the 6th–12th level range. The vast majority of adventure submissions we recieve are for mid-level. Even after I've practically begged on message boards for people to submit epic level adventure proposals, we only get one or two proposals a year. We even see the unpopularity of higher-level play rearing its head in our Adventure Paths—the issues with high-level Adventure Path episodes simply don't sell as many copies as those with the low- and mid-level adventures.

Why is this? Simple: each time the PCs level up, the game gets more complicated. This level of complexity carries over into adventure design. For example, every few levels, a new batch of spells renders certain adventure plots obsolete. Murder mysteries become defunct at level 5, when speak with dead *is available. Assassination plots seem less exciting once you can simply raise the king from the dead. And dungeon crawls after the party cleric can cast* wind walk *and* find the path *essentially become one-shot combats with the boss monster who lives in the last room. In order to design a compelling high-level adventure, these and many more concerns need to be addressed. And all this happens well before the PCs reach 20th level. If the game's this hard at 17th level, it's no wonder not many people stick around to see what it's like at 27th level.* —James Jacobs

Savage Tide

The Sea Wyvern's Wake

All ocean voyages are fraught with peril, yet a voyage to the infamous Isle of Dread might seem to some old salts to be a deliberate goading of the gods of the sea. Many of those who have attempted the voyage before and managed to return to civilization often choose not to speak of the trials they experienced on the dangerous route, yet those whose lips can be loosened by a draught of grog whisper amazing stories... tales of pirates, sea monsters, terrifying storms, and perhaps most harrowing of all, of a strange and sinister land without land, a floating graveyard of dead ships mired in a sargasso the size of an island. This place has many names, but its most well-known may be its most apt—Journey's End.

"The Sea Wyvern's Wake" is the third chapter of the Savage Tide Adventure Path, a complete campaign consisting of 12 adventures appearing in *Dungeon* magazine. For additional aid in running this campaign, check out *Dragon* magazine's monthly "Savage Tidings" articles, a series that helps players and DMs prepare for and expand upon the campaign. Issue #350 of *Dragon* magazine features a regional guide to the seafaring environs the PCs can expect on the journey to the Isle of Dread.

BY RICHARD PETT
BY BEN WOOTTEN AND WARREN MAHY
BY ROBERT LAZZARETTI

ADVENTURE PATH | LOW LEVEL (1ST–5TH) | SEA VOYAGE

Switching Sides

If the PCs decided to go to work for Rowyn in "There Is No Honor," you'll need to change some aspects of "The Sea Wyvern's Wake." It's likely that by the time this adventure comes along, the PCs have helped Rowyn and the Lotus Dragons gain control over Sasserine's Harbor. After several weeks, Rowyn grows bored and sets her eyes on new targets. She approaches the PCs with a plan—during her time with Vanthus, she learned that his parents established a colony on a distant island. She's uncovered sea charts that lead to this colony, and plans on sailing south to see what can be done to plunder it—after all, the Vanderborens have proven to be an excellent source of plunder, and with the Sasserine harbor under Lotus Dragon control, she really sees no reason to stay in town all the time. Rowyn hires two ships, and places the PCs in charge of one. Her plan: to masquerade as a resupply convoy, sail down to Farshore, and usurp control of the colony. With a lock on the rare and exotic imports the Isle of Dread has to offer, the fortunes of all involved can certainly do nothing but swell.

If you run this version, the stowaway on the PCs' ship becomes someone else; it might be fun to make the stowaway Lavinia herself, driven to despair and madness by the ruin brought upon her by the Lotus Dragons and the PCs and now obsessed with getting revenge against them.

Adventure Background

Larissa Vanderboren had long held a longing for the unexplored regions of the world. While her husband Verik became an adventurer as a means to secure personal glory and a mountain of wealth, Larissa saw the adventuring lifestyle as a chance to explore the unexplored, to experience the unknown. When Verik Vanderboren hit upon the risky and unconventional idea of establishing a colony on the shores of the infamous Isle of Dread in 593 CY, Larissa saw only the opportunity for discovery. While Verik spent months building the colony fortress of Farshore and interacting with the locals to establish peaceful relations, Larissa was out exploring the Isle of Dread and writing her journal—a journal that has recently fallen into the hands of her daughter, Lavinia.

Adventure Synopsis

Lavinia recruits the PCs to aid her in a long journey south to visit and resupply the colony of Farshore on the Isle of Dread. The PCs are put in charge of a ship captured in the previous adventure, the *Sea Wyvern*. Their journey takes them from the city of Sasserine along the coast of the Amedio Jungle, and along the way they encounter several dangers and perils, including possible treachery from within. After a quick stop at the infamous ruins of Tamoachan to do a bit of exploring, they must run a blockade of Scarlet Brotherhood ships. Meanwhile, the PCs discover an old enemy, Rowyn Kellani, who has stowed away on board and is busy making trouble.

Eventually, they hit the open sea and arrive at the centerpiece of the adventure, an immense sargasso sea in which dozens of ancient ships lie lodged. The *Sea Wyvern* becomes enmeshed in the creepy seaweed as well. In order to free their ship and continue onward, the PCs must defeat the vine horrors of the sargasso and slay the heart of the seaweed, a plant monster known as the Mother of All.

Finally, the PCs reach the Isle of Dread during a tremendous storm. The *Sea Wyvern*, battered and sinking, crashes on the northern shore of the island.

Welcome to the Isle of Dread!

Adventure Hooks

If you aren't running "The Sea Wyvern's Wake" as part of the Savage Tide Adventure Path, you can use this adventure at any time the PCs need to travel from one point to another—you need simply change or adjust the nature of their starting and ending points as appropriate.

PART ONE: A MODEST PROPOSAL

After the harrowing events of "The Bullywug Gambit," the PCs should have a chance to relax. Give them time to craft magic items, research spells, explore Sasserine, and if they're not quite 5th-level yet, perhaps go on a few side quests into the region surrounding Sasserine (issue #349 of DRAGON magazine details many of the locations surrounding the city). When they're ready to start the adventure, they receive a message from their patron, **Lavinia Vanderboren** (NG female human aristocrat 2/swashbuckler 2), inviting them to a meeting at her manor house.

The current atmosphere of Vanderboren Manor gives the place a busy, vibrant feel. Not only has Lavinia retained several workers to repair the damage done to the manor during the bullywug attack in the previous adventure, but as her fortunes slowly recover, she's hired a new staff of servants to tend to the manor's needs. Having just finished a funeral service for her last major-domo Kora Whistlegap (who died during the previous adventure) and washed her hands of capturing her scoundrel brother Vanthus (who has fled to parts unknown), Lavinia is eager to turn to the future. And for Lavinia, that future encompasses a long sea voyage.

When the PCs arrive, they find Lavinia in the main dining room, pawing over a number of nautical maps, sea charts, and a large journal they may recognize as the one they recovered from the family vault in "There Is No Honor." When the PCs make their presence known, she smiles and invites them to sit at the table. Read or paraphrase the following to the PCs:

"Do you recall this journal we recovered from my family vault? It turns out that it was my mother's. My parents, may the gods rest their souls, were brave—foolish and rash some would say, but I have never been one to criticize an adventurous spirit. On the contrary—" she casts a wry smile at you all. "I admire it. In any event, it would seem that about four years ago, my mother and father undertook a risky endeavor. They sailed the *Blue Nixie*, along with a ship full of colonists, down south and across the Vohoun Ocean to a place they refer to as the Isle of Dread.

"You may have heard of this place—if you haven't, it seems apparent from reading my mother's journals that the place is aptly named. A jungle-covered hell infested with immense reptilian monsters, feral savages, and peril at every turn. Yet the southern peninsula remains relatively sheltered from the menaces on the isle mainland, and it was here, among the villages of several friendly locals, that my parents founded the colony of Farshore.

"The Isle of Dread represents an untapped trove of resources—exotic lumber, spices, animals, foods, and even minerals like silver and gold. Once Farshore was up and running, the influx of trade would have guaranteed my family a relatively uncontested flow of wealth. Yet before mother and father were able to return to Farshore with supplies and more colonists... my brother made his move and left me in the state you found me in a few short weeks ago.

Lavinia indicates her mother's journal. "Since we recovered this journal, I have not been idle. If Farshore fails, than my parents' last legacy fails. I intend to carry on their work, and have planned for a journey south to the Isle of Dread to resupply and join the colonists at Farshore for the rest of the year. I have the *Blue Nixie* readying in the harbor to take fresh supplies to the colony, but I find myself a vessel short." Lavinia's face breaks into a glowing grin as she continues, "You wouldn't know of anyone with stout hearts who might happen to be interested in helping me mount this expedition, do you? I fear the journey itself might grow dangerous at times, and there's no way of knowing what state or condition Farshore is currently in, but I suspect that danger is a vice you have."

Lavinia plans on taking her family ship, the *Blue Nixie*, to Farshore, and is already in the process of hiring a crew, outfitting it with supplies for the voyage, and recruiting additional colonists. Yet the amount of supplies she calculates Farshore needs greatly exceeds the amount she can haul with a single ship—she needs another sizable vessel to accompany the *Nixie* south. Fortunately, the PCs may well know of a perfect candidate—the *Sea Wyvren*. This former pirate ship was moored at Kraken's Cove in the previous adventure, and if the PCs haven't already claimed it as their own, a return trip to the Cove finds the ship still there, safe and sound. Technically abandoned, ownership of the *Sea Wyvern* now falls to whoever claims it first, and as fortune would have it, no one else knows about the abandoned ship.

If the PCs agree to Lavinia's request, she sees no reason to wait. She'd like to leave for Farshore as soon as possible. The *Blue Nixie* can be ready to go in a day—all that needs be done is for the PCs to make the *Sea Wyvern* ready as well.

Preparing for the Voyage

The PCs (and by extension, the players) may be ill-prepared to manage the logistics of a long sea journey. If they have little interest in preparing the *Sea Wyvern* for the trip, you should skip over this section of the adventure. Simply tell them that it takes a week to prepare for the voyage, introduce them to the crew and passengers, and start them on their way with Part Two.

Yet if the PCs want to take part in the preparation for the journey, let them take the initiative on planning for the voyage and outfitting the *Sea Wyvern*. Listed below is a checklist of the things that need to be addressed before the PCs take off. Any character who has at least 5 ranks in Profession (sailor) automatically knows these steps. If your PCs don't include someone with this level of nautical knowledge, a DC 15 Profession (sailor) check reveals it; otherwise they'll either need to consult a sailor NPC or run the risk of forgetting something critical.

The Voyage to Come: Using her mother's journal and extensive charts, Lavinia has already plotted her course out for the expedition. She intends to hug the coast of the Amedio Jungle until she reaches the far side of the peninsula, at which point she plans to sail more or less directly south from there to the Isle of Dread. DRAGON magazine #350's installment of "Savage Tidings" presents what Lavinia knows of the journey in detail; if you're not using this article, feel free to drop hints to the PCs as to what they can expect along the way as you see fit. The voyage itself covers just over 3,000

The Sea Wyvern's Passengers

The key NPCs on the *Sea Wyvern* are listed below. Full stat blocks for them appear in sidebars throughout the following pages. You should round out the passengers on the ship with enough incidental NPCs (crew and colonists heading south to Farshore) to bring the crew up to a total of 23 members. The names and personalities of these additional NPCs are left to you to design, so you can customize them to your own campaign. NPCs marked with an asterisk play key roles in the next adventure—do your best to keep these NPCs alive.

Amella Venkalie*: If no PC has the skill to captain the *Sea Wyven*, Amella fills this role; otherwise, she can serve as a first mate, crew member, or advisor for the journey.

Father Feres (AKA Conrad Horst): A disguised criminal, Conrad has hired himself out as a mule for some sinister folk and uses the *Sea Wyvern* to escape persecution in Sasserine.

Avner Meravanchi*: A spoiled and despicable cur, Avner also represents the primary investor for the voyage south.

Skald: A mysterious figure fleeing assassins from the northern port of the Styes, Skald serves as a red herring. When things start turning sour, he's a prime suspect even though he's actually innocent.

Urol Forol*: A gnome naturalist who's studied the Isle of Dread extensively, Urol also wants to stop at the legendary ruined city of Tamoachan during the voyage.

Lirith Veldirose: Lirith gives the PCs a little extra firepower for the many onboard combats that await them on the journey to come. She can also serve as a member of the crew.

Rowyn Kellani: Rowyn is a stowaway who seeks to get vengeance on the PCs for their role in ruining her plans in "There Is No Honor." For much of the voyage, no one knows she's on board.

Tavey Nesk*: A young and excited lad, Tavey is the *Sea Wyvern's* cabin boy and an idolizer of one of the PCs. The PCs should know he's there, but he doesn't play a major role in the Savage Tide until "Here There Be Monsters."

miles. Including stops to resupply here and there, and assuming fair weather and minimal mishaps along the way, Lavinia estimates that the entire journey should take not much more than three months.

Securing a Vessel: Lavinia needs a second ship to make the voyage; she can't carry all of the colonists and supplies on the *Blue Nixie* alone. She's looking for another caravel-class ship, but with her expenses tied up elsewhere, she can't afford the cost of hiring one (let alone purchasing one for 10,000 gp). The easiest solution to this dilemma is the *Sea Wyvern*, a perfectly-sized ship that escaped the inferno at Kraken's Cove in the previous adventure. Even if the PCs ignored her completely in "The Bullywug Gambit," the *Sea Wyvern* remains moored at the cove, safe and sound. Local salvage laws grant ownership of any found vessel in a case like this, so for the PCs, the *Sea Wyvern* is theirs for the taking. They may have to sail the *Blue Nixie* out to Kraken's Cove to collect it, but this should be a fairly minor task requiring only a few days' work.

Securing a Crew: The *Sea Wyvern* requires a crew of at least seven to sail, and can comfortably accommodate up to 30 people on a long voyage (although there's bunk space for 22, an additional 8 can sleep on mats in the galley or the forward hold, if needed). This adventure assumes that a total of 23 passengers (including the PCs, named NPCs, colonists, and one vengeful stowaway, who doesn't use one of the bunks) set out on the voyage. Consult the "Sea Wyvern's Passengers" sidebar for a complete list of names.

In order to make the voyage to the Isle of Dread, the *Sea Wyvern* needs a crew capable of making Profession (sailor) checks (typically, these rolls are made by the ship captain) and Knowledge (geography) checks (normally made by the navigator). If none of the PCs can fill these roles, Amella Venkalie takes the role of captain for the voyage, and Urol Forol the role of navigator. Fortunately, Lavinia has already secured a crew and taken on passengers for the voyage, so unless the PCs insist on replacing crew members or adding new crew or passengers, this stage should consist of little more than a "meet and greet" of the NPCs involved.

Supplies and Cargo: The *Sea Wyvern's* hold, storage lockers, and other areas must carry at least 60 tons of supplies for Farshore, leaving an additional 60 tons of space for supplies. Ten tons of this space is consumed by repair supplies for the ship itself. A further 10 tons of food, water, and other miscellaneous supplies for the passengers and crew leaves 40 tons of space for the PCs to play with. If Avner Meravanchi has his way and is allowed to bring along his prize horse

The Ship's Captain

AMELLA VENKALIE **CR 4**
Female human rogue 4
CN Medium humanoid
Init +2; **Senses** Listen +1, Spot +1
Languages Common

AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 16; uncanny dodge
hp 20 (4 HD)
Fort +2, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2; evasion

Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk rapier +6 (1d6–1/18–20)
Ranged light crossbow +5 (1d8/19–20)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +2
Atk Options sneak attack +2d6
Combat Gear *elixir of swimming, potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of remove disease*

Abilities Str 8, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 16
SQ trapfinding, trap sense +1
Feats Persuasive, Skill Focus (Profession [sailor]), Weapon Finesse
Skills Balance +11, Bluff +12, Craft (carpentry) +7, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (geography) +7, Profession (sailor) +11, Swim +6, Tumble +9, Use Rope +9
Possessions combat gear, masterwork studded leather armor, masterwork rapier, light crossbow with 20 bolts, *ring of protection +1*, silver ring decorated with tiny emeralds that look like multiple eyes worth 200 gp

A slight but powerful woman with fine blonde hair tied neatly back from her forehead, Amella dresses to fight and sail rather than to please the eye. A thin scar graces her right cheek. Amella is rather foul-mouthed, fond of uttering oaths only heard in the worst dockside taverns. Confident, haughty, and astute, she does not suffer fools gladly. She makes few attachments, having buried one husband—a dashing sea captain named Heldram Flashwell. They once ran a smuggling operation some distance from Sasserine, but were betrayed by a group of shifty gnomes led by a treacherous cur named Shortstone Badgewell—it was this cruel gnome who murdered her husband. This event has left Amella with a poor opinion of gnomes. She makes friends slowly, but once someone has earned her trust, she's quite loyal despite her carefree attitude. At your discretion, one of the PCs might bear a more-than-passing resmblance to her late husband, in which case her reaction to the PC could blossom into romance or degrade into a bitter rivalry, depending on how that PC treats her.

Thunderstrike, she and her food supplies consume another 10 tons of space. If they don't have any other particular requests, Lavinia suggests using any remaining space to load up on additional supplies for the colony.

Armaments: The *Sea Wyvern* is not currently outfitted with any siege weapons. If the PCs wish to add a ballista or catapult (*Dungeon Master's Guide* 99–100) to the caravel, they may do so. The *Sea Wyvern* can accommodate up to two ballistae or one light catapult.

PART TWO: LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVES

Once the PCs have met the crew and passengers, are comfortable with the Sea Wyvern's cargo and armament, and have said any goodbyes to friends they may be leaving behind in Sasserine, the journey may begin. The two ships set out from the harbor at dawn, and within the hour have left the familiar skyline of Sasserine behind. While the PCs may wish to return here later in the campaign via spells like *greater teleport*, the adventures themselves are not scheduled to return to Sasserine. As the city slips around the bend to the stern, the next stage of the campaign truly begins.

The map of the voyage on page 31 shows the route Lavinia has charted for the two ships. Letters indicate encounters along this route. Certain time-based events not keyed to specific points on the journey occur as well. Feel free to liven up the voyage along the way with other random encounters as you wish.

As the journey proceeds, don't dwell too much on daily routines. The voyage ahead will last, at the minimum, three months—the PCs will have plenty of down time to relax or even to craft magic items (although you might wish to limit item crafting if the PCs haven't brought along tools for the job).

Naval Combat

At times during this adventure, the PCs' ship may be attacked by enemies. *Stormwrack* has extensive rules for naval combat, but if you aren't using that book in your campaign, the following quick rules should suffice.

A ship effectively has three areas an enemy can target: the rigging, the hull, and the ship itself. A ship has a number of "sections" in its rigging and hull, each with its own hit points. A hit against a ship damages a randomly determined section of the ship. It's possible to target a specific section of a ship, but specific sections have a higher AC than the ship as a whole. Destroying a section of a ship's rigging reduces its speed by 10 feet. Destroying a section of a ship's hull reduces its speed by 10 feet and holes the ship. Each time a ship is holed, its captain must make a Profession (sailor) check to avoid sinking (DC 15 +4 for each hole after the first). On a successful check, the ship does not sink but the captain must make a new sinking check every hour thereafter until the holed section is repaired up to at least 1 hit point or the ship sinks.

A ship takes 1d100 minutes to sink once this check is failed, unless the ship has lost 25% or more of its hull sections, in which case it takes only 1d6 minutes to sink.

To repair a damaged section requires a Craft (carpentry) check and 1 minute of work. For every point by which this check exceeds DC 19, 1 hit point is restored. A section that has been destroyed can be repaired completely with a DC 20 Craft check and one day of work. Each day of repair work (successful or not) consumes one ton of repair supplies.

The Sea Wyvern

The *Sea Wyvern* is a caravel-class sailing ship. Full statistics for caravels appear on page 98 of *Stormwrack*, but the following information should be enough for you to run encounters involving the *Sea Wyvern*.

Seaworthiness: Any Profession (sailor) checks made to avoid foundering, sinking, and other hazards that large, well-built vessels avoid more easilly than smaller ones receive a +4 bonus.

Shiphandling: Any Profession (sailor) checks made to avoid collisions, sailing, or other situations that small, swift vessels avoid more easilly than large and clumsy ones receive a +2 bonus.

Speed: The *Sea Wyvern* has a speed of 30 feet in normal wind, allowing it to travel at a rate of 3 miles per hour. In moderate wind, her speed increases to 60 feet, while in strong winds it increases to 90 feet. The Sea Wyvern can change its speed up to 10 feet per round and turn up to 45° after moving at least 60 feet in one direction. This adventure assumes the entire journey, with the exception of two storms, is with normal winds.

Combat: The *Sea Wyvern's* overall Armor Class is –3. It has 24 hull sections (AC 3, hardness 5, hp 80) and 3 rigging sections (AC 1, hardness 0, hp 80). If six hull sections are destroyed, the ship sinks automatically. If the ship rams a target, it inflicts 4d6 points of damage per 10 feet of speed.

The Blue Nixie

Although there are two ships on the expedition, they stay in sight of one another for most of the adventure. As a result, when making Profession (sailor) or Knowledge (geography) checks to pilot or maneuver the ships, it's best to only make one check for both vessels. The PCs should be encouraged to remain on the *Sea Wyvern*, in any event, if only to keep things running smoothly for the adventure.

The *Blue Nixie's* crew and passengers include Lavinia Vanderboren, the Jade Ravens (a second group of adventurers that serve the Vanderboren family—the PCs interacted with these adventurers in the last adventure), and several other NPCs who have little role to play in this adventure or the next, but become key characters once the PCs reach Farshore.

The Weather

Lavinia has chosen the best time of the year to travel—the weather, for much of the journey, is quite pleasant. With the exception of the two storms the PCs encounter at the end of the voyage, they have little to fear from nature in this regard.

If you use *Stormwrack* in your campaign, feel free to use the charts in Chapter One of that book to determine weather, wind, and precipitation for the voyage.

The Voyage

When the expedition sets out, one of the navigators on the *Blue Nixie* or the *Sea Wyvern* must make a Knowledge (geography) check to plot a course. This normally determines if you arrive on target, but for the purposes of this adventure, you can assume that between the two ships, at least one navigator makes the DC 15 Knowledge (geography) check required to make the voyage.

Of greater import are the daily piloting checks to stay on the intended course. You should make this Knowledge (geography) check in secret. The *Blue Nixie's* navigator and Urol Forol on the *Sea Wyvern* both have Knowledge (geography) +12; if one of the PCs has a higher modifier, use that character's modifier instead.

As long as the Amedio coastline is in sight, it's a DC 8 Knowledge (geography) check to pilot the expedition. Missing one piloting check doesn't mean the expedition is lost, but it does increase the next day's check to DC 10. If a second consecutive check is failed, the third day's check rises to DC 13. If three checks in a row are failed, the expedition becomes lost. This is immediately obvious, as the coastline should not match that indicated on the sea charts. A DC 20 Knowledge (geography) check is enough to get back on course, but each check adds a day to the journey.

Once the expedition heads south into the open sea after encounter G, it's a DC 17 check to navigate (rising to DC 19 after a day's failed check, and then DC 22 after two consecutive failures). Make a DC 20 Survival check for each PC once per hour to see if any of them notice the expedition is lost (you should also make a Survival +14 check to represent the crew as a whole as well). Each hour, the DC drops by 1 point, until someone notices the expedition is lost. Once the expedition realizes they're lost, a DC 25 Knowledge (geography) check is enough to get back on course, but each check adds a day to the journey.

The Crew

The *Sea Wyvern's* crew must consist of at least seven people. One crew member must have ranks in Profession (sailor), and one must have ranks in Knowledge (geography). You should leave the selection of who's on the crew up to the PCs; of the named NPCs on the voyage, Amella Venkalie, Skald, Urol Forol, and Lirith Veldirose make excellent choices. Tavey Nesk is the ship's cabin boy, but he's not technically part of the ship's crew. Crewmembers sleep in the bunks at the ship's stern (each of the bunks shown on the map are two bunks high). The seventh crew member is the captain,

The Dishonest Priest

Conrad Horst, AKA Father Feres CR 2
Male human expert 3
CN Medium humanoid
Init +0; **Senses** Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Common, Dwarven

AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10
hp 7 (3 HD)
Fort +0, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

Spd 30 ft.
Melee dagger +2 (1d4/19–20)
Ranged dagger +2 (1d4/19–20)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +2
Combat Gear *potion of cure light wounds* (3), *potion of lesser restoration*, *wand of cure light wounds* (32 charges)
Imbued Spells (CL 7th)
1st—*cure light wounds* (2)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 11, Con 8, Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 13
Feats Persuasive, Skill Focus (Bluff), Skill Focus (Use Magic Device)
Skills Appraise +7, Bluff +12, Diplomacy +11, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (religion) +7, Sense Motive +5, Spellcraft +7, Use Magic Device +10 (+12 scrolls)
Possessions combat gear, dagger, wooden holy symbol of Hieroneous, small locked box (DC 25 Open Lock; contains two scrolls of contact other plane and a map of Limbo portal locations in the world)

Former scribe Conrad Horst is a consummate liar, and has taken Lavinia in by convincing her that he's a clergyman. In fact, Conrad is a desperate criminal recently forced to flee Cauldron when his scam of swindling old ladies out of valuable heirlooms came to light, and he spent several months hiding out in Sasserine.

Conrad has recently hired his services out as a mule to a sinister man whose name he doesn't know. In return for delivering a sealed box to a shrine of Hieroneous at Fort Blackwell, his benefactor arranged for Conrad a new identity as a priest. Disguised as Father Feres, Conrad hopes to travel to Farshore not only to escape persecution from his enemies, but to establish his scams in a new location unaware of his talents.

If there are PC worshipers of Hieroneous in your campaign, you might want to consider switching Conrad's cover identity so that he worships a deity not represented in the party. If you make this change, you should change the shrine of Hieroneous at Fort Blackwell (encounter A) as well.

who sleeps in the captain's cabin on the main deck at the stern, and is likely the only person on board who gets a room to himself. Tavey often chooses to sleep on deck, even in the crow's nest at times.

The Passengers

Anyone not a member of the crew is a passenger. The forward barracks on the ship's lower deck contain five relatively cramped bunks, three beds high. After the crew of 7, the remaining 15 passengers all sleep here. Some of them may choose, at times, to sleep elsewhere (on deck above on nice nights, or even slumped in a chair in the galley). The unnamed passengers are non-combatants, and whenever the ship is under attack, they quickly flee below decks for safety. If statistics for a passenger become relevant, assume they are all AC 10, have 5 hit points, and are unarmed.

The 23rd passenger is Rowyn Kellani, a stowaway. She remains hidden in the ship's hold for much of the adventure. Rowyn is quite adept at hiding her presence, both via skill and via magic. If the PCs insist on searching the hold on any day, it's a DC 30 Search check to find evidence that she's on board. For more information about Rowyn's plans, see event 4.

Provisions

If you're not interested in tracking provision consumption during this adventure, it's easy enough to ignore as long as the PCs don't take a major side trek or spend a lot of extra time at Tamoachan or other stops along the way.

If you want to add this level of realism to the adventure, assume that one person consumes a unit of provisions each day. With 23 people and a horse on board, that means that each day that passes, 24 units of food are consumed. The 10 tons of food Lavinia loads onto the *Sea Wyvern* at the start of the voyage consists of 2,000 units—enough for an 83-day voyage. This is just barely enough to reach the Isle of Dread; Lavinia intends on restocking food at friendly ports during the voyage, but it might be a good idea for the PCs to dedicate some of their remaining cargo space to extra provisions.

If food runs low, the PCs can put their crew and passengers on rations, in which case a person consumes only half a unit per day (reducing consumption to 12 units per day). Likewise, attrition and loss of crew or passengers reduces the draw on the ship's stores.

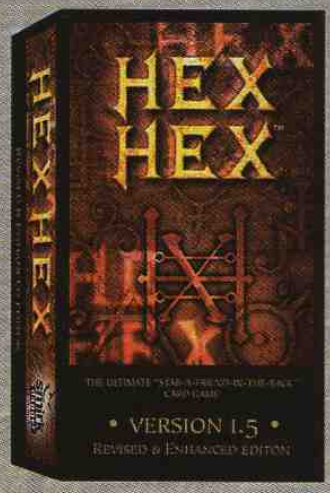
Event 1: This is an Outrage!

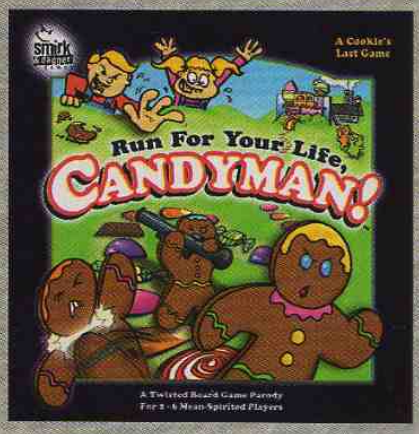
Avner Meravanchi wastes no time establishing himself as a troublemaker. He arrives a half hour late but doesn't apologize. With him are his two servants and his magnificent steed Thunderstrike. The horse is, if anything, as spoiled as Avner, and getting it secured in the jury-rigged pen that's been set up for it in the *Sea Wyvern's* hold takes another half hour. During this time, Avner discovers that he's expected to sleep with the other "commoners" in the forward barracks, and demands his own accommodations.

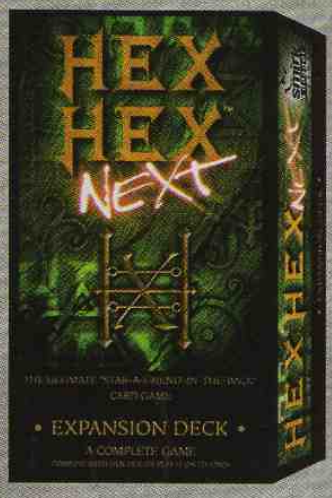
This scene is an excellent way to introduce the characters of the key NPCs as they react to Avner's temper tantrum. Amella has little patience for him, and unless the PCs intervene she makes it clear that Avner can sleep with the rest of the passengers or he can stay in Sasserine. Father Feres does his best to try to soothe Avner and play the part of a priest, but a few choice words from Avner about Feres' ear hair and baldness sends the priest into a private sulk for a few days. Skald avoids the confrontation by busying himself at the far end of the ship, while Urol takes up an almost obnoxious interest in Thunderstrike's pedigree. Lirith sees in Avner a chance to make friends with a noble, and might offer to share her bunk with him.

In the end, it's up to the PCs how to handle the situation. Any solution that results in Avner getting his own room makes the nobleman happy. With a DC 30 Diplomacy check, the PCs can convince him that it might be fun in a "slumming" sort of way to sleep in the forward barracks, in which case the nobleman reluctantly agrees. Any other solution leaves Avner bitter and cantankerous, and throughout the voyage he second-guesses the PCs and attempts to undermine or countermand his orders, becoming even more of a nuisance than he would be otherwise.

'Cause The Holidays are a lot more fun when you can stab a friend in the back!







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Event 2: Dinner with Lavinia (EL 3)

Once the voyage is underway, Lavinia sends a message via a rowboat piloted by one of her crew—she wants to invite the PCs, their crew, and Avner Meravanchi over to the *Blue Nixie* for dinner to celebrate the start of the expedition that evening.

As dusk falls, the two ships close and a line is thrown between the two, a pulley is attached, and a net seat is hoisted, allowing for safe crossing between the two ships. Lavinia looks very fine that evening, dressed in a silk shirt, jewelry, and dress. She leads her guests into the ship's galley; the *Blue Nixie* is a bit bigger than the *Sea Wyvern*, and even after only a couple days, the PCs should feel relieved to get a little bit more elbow room. A fine spread is laid out on the table, including grouse, peacock, and elven wine imported from Celene.

Consider the meal an opportunity for each character to interact with their crew, Lavinia, and the Jade Ravens. (If you aren't running this adventure as part of the Savage Tide Adventure Path, you should omit the Jade Ravens from the dinner.) In the pleasant surroundings of the cabin, allow PCs a +2 bonus on Diplomacy checks made to make an impression. This moment could begin potential romances (or further them along, if any PCs have begun relationships with the Jade Ravens or Lavinia herself), and any connections the PCs make will help spice up the rest of this adventure, as events in the later stages of Savage Tide run better when the PCs have more to care for than just treasure. Be sure to note PC actions toward NPCs and feel free to vary future interactions accordingly. At the end of the evening a final drink is taken on deck after the evening sun has sunk but the air is still pleasantly warm outside. As the sun sets, it is finally time to return to the *Sea Wyvern*.

Creature: During the dinner, Rowyn Kellani has been busy. Using *disguise self* and *invisibility* to move undetected among the *Sea Wyvern's* crew, she positions her *pickled mephit* on the upper deck inside a coil of rope near the mast, where it remains hidden. She then cuts nearly all the way through the rope supporting the net chair and pulley between the ships. The first character to cross back to the *Sea Wyvern* via the net chair can make a DC 25 Spot Check to notice the cut rope. Otherwise, as he is halfway across, the rope suddenly snaps and drops the character into the water below. The fall deals no damage to the PC, but he must immediately begin making DC 15 Swim checks.

The round after this occurs, Rowyn casts *open/close* on the *pickled mephit* from her vantage point near the door down to the lower deck, opening it up and releasing its cranky occupant into

The Dashing Deviant

AVNER MERAVANCHI CR 2
Male human aristocrat 3
LN Medium humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Common
AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10

hp 13 (3 HD)
Fort +2, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2
Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk longsword +3 (1d8/19–20)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +2
Atk Options Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack
Abilities Str 11, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 9, Cha 8
Feats Alertness, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack
Skills Bluff +5, Diplomacy +9, Forgery +6, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +6, Ride +7
Possessions masterwork longsword, steamer trunk filled with several suits of fine clothing (worth 400 gp in all), six bottles of fine wine worth 100 gp per bottle (hidden in steamer trunk), Meravanchi signet ring worth 250 gp, leather-bound journal chronicling his conquests among Sasserine's maidens and debutantes (approximately half of the contents are embellished and falsified), Thunderstrike (light horse), military saddle

Avner is a despicable cur—a slanderer, a deflowerer of maidens, and an utter cad who cares only about himself. Yet on the surface he is charming, helpful, and brave. This is all an act. When trouble appears, he disappears. When coins go missing, he is the culprit. When ladies are left in a lurch at the altar, he's off frolicking with their sisters.

Despite the slow recovery of her wealth, Lavinia couldn't quite finance her expedition to Farshore on her own. She spoke with the other noble families of Sasserine, but only one felt the profits for aiding her outweighed the dangers—the semi-notorious Meravanchis. Of course, Avner's father, Zebula, had an additional reason to send Avner on this trip. By giving Avner the responsibility for representing Meravanchi interests in Farshore, he effectively removes the threat of him embarrassing the family in Sasserine. Avner has no concept that his father wanted to get rid of him, and carries with him a vastly inflated sense of self-import as a result. Traveling with Avner are two meek servants (Banaby Chisk and Quenge Asper, both 1st-level human experts) who defer to his every need but are otherwise unobtrusive.

the evening air. She then ducks back down to hide in the hold, leaving the mephit to do its thing.

Water Mephit: hp 19; *Monster Manual* 185.

Tactics: The water mephit released from the jar is particularly angry at having been imprisoned for so long, and immediately attacks the closest target, be it a PC or a passenger, with its breath weapon. It follows up with a *Melf's acid arrow* and then a *stinking cloud* before it engages the closest creature in melee. If the mephit is reduced below 5 hit points, it dives into the sea and waits for its fast healing to repair the damage before emerging to continue harassing the PCs. After being reduced to 5 hit points twice, the mephit gives up and flies away.

Event 3: Father Feres' Illness (EL 8)

Conrad Horst has a mission. In return for a fairly convincing disguise as Father Feres the priest (including an *imbue with spell ability* to give him the ability to cast a few spells along the way to help his disguise) and a method to escape the Sasserine law, he agreed to do a favor for a shady smuggler he contacted in Sasserine's Shadowshore district. The smuggler asked Conrad to deliver the package to a shrine of Hieroneous in Fort Blackwell, and Conrad agreed readily.

Unfortunately for Conrad, both the smuggler and the "shrine of Hieroneous" in Fort Blackwell are in fact members of a sinister cult known as the Wizards of the Hopping Prophet, a cabal of slaadi-worshiping bigots who wish to infest the Material Plane with chaos in the form of their beloved outsiders. The sealed box Conrad's been asked to deliver contains two scrolls of *contact other plane* and a map that purports to identify a half dozen portals to Limbo scattered throughout the world. The map's authenticity is left for you to determine.

Creature: When the PCs visit Fort Blackwell (see encounter A in Part Three), Conrad makes his delivery and agrees to the priests' invitation to stay the night, during which he is impregnated with a red slaad egg as thanks for helping the cult—the cultists care not what comes of Conrad's spawn, only that it emerges in the world to spread chaos.

Six days later, Father Feres falls desperately ill, taking a –10 penalty to all ability scores (minimum 1). His skin flushes, he can't keep down food or water, and he grows delirious, moaning and complaining that the world's grown too bright and soft around the edges. A *remove disease* spell cures him of the infestation, and a DC 15 Heal check locates the strange pulsing growth nestled in his belly. A DC 25 Heal check allows its removal and destruction (each attempt to remove the egg deals 1d4 points of damage to Conrad).

If the PCs don't learn of Father Feres' condition (or if they fail to remove the red slaad egg), one day after he falls ill his body rips apart in a terrific explosion as a fully-formed blue slaad tears free into the world.

Blue Slaad: hp 68; *Monster Manual* 229.

Tactics: The blue slaad wastes little time trying to figure out where it's been born into if there are any creatures to eat—it's quite ravenous. The monster uses *telekinesis* to hurl characters overboard, or *chaos hammer* if it ever needs to hit a lot of foes at once. Otherwise, it simply tears into the nearest enemy with its claws and bite. It attempts to summon another blue slaad if reduced below 20 hit points, but otherwise fights to the death.

Note that a blue slaad is a dangerous foe for 5th-level characters, but if they allow Conrad's condition to go this far, you should pull no punches in the fight. The fact that the slaad doesn't discriminate between PCs and passengers should help the PCs a little, even if it costs a few of their passengers in the process.

Development: If the PCs save Father Feres, he may decide to come clean and admit his crimes, throwing himself on their feet for mercy. How the PCs deal with Conrad is up to them; he has no further role scheduled for the Savage Tide, so whatever his fate, it will not impact future adventures.

Ad-Hoc Experience Award: If the PCs save Father Feres and prevent the blue slaad from reaching maturity, grant

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I can turn undead.
Can YOU turn undead?
I didn't think so.
I ♥ my geek.
CLERIC
just because I heal you doesn't mean I like you.
Chaotic Evil
I'M THE GM, SO THAT MAKES ALL YOU GUYS MY BITCHES!
YOU choose the style
YOU choose the color
WE DO THE REST!
Orders received by 12/10 will ship by 12/15
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them an experience award as if they had defeated the CR 8 creature in combat.

Event 4: Rowyn's Vengeance (EL 8)

Rowyn Kellani was once the guildmistress of the largest thieves' guild in Sasserine—at least, until the PCs defeated her Lotus Dragons and forced her to abandon her wealth and flee for her life. Since then, she has seethed with a need for revenge. When she learned the PCs were preparing for a voyage, she knew she had to be on their ship. Fortunately for the bitter ex-guildmistress, her magic made stowing away a simple task.

If your PCs killed Rowyn in "There Is No Honor," you have a choice. You can omit this encounter entirely, replace Rowyn with another Kellani (perhaps she left behind a sister), or change Rowyn into an agent of the Crimson Fleet named Hannah Larn. Hannah has been sent by the fleet to spy on the voyage, but as it turns out, Hannah has a particular bone to pick with one of the NPCs on the ship. Perhaps she's one of Avner's jilted lovers, or was humiliated in a duel some time past with Amelia. In this case, her primary target becomes an NPC, and the PCs are simply in her way. In any event, the rest of this event assumes the stowaway is Rowyn Kellani.

Creature: Rowyn is patient. She makes, at most, only one attempt to hurt the PCs a week, since she doesn't want to expose her presence. She's been defeated by them once before—she has little desire to fight fair. Listed below are several possible methods Rowyn uses to murder the PCs.

Poisoning: Rowyn uses *disguise self* to appear as one of the passengers, then slips into the kitchen before a meal and laces one of the PCs' meals with a dose of arsenic (Fortitude DC 13, 1 Con/1d8 Con). She repeats the poisoning every day for 3 days, or until she thinks that the PCs might be on to her. An investigation into who might be poisoning the food should lead the PCs to the passenger Rowyn was impersonating. Whether or not the PCs believe the shocked passenger's claims of innocence is up to them.

Seduction 1: If one of the PCs is carying on a romance with an NPC, Rowyn approaches that PC one night with *disguise self* to appear as the NPC and invites that PC to somewhere private for some fun. Once she has the PC alone, Rowyn begins to dance for the PC, using Disguise Spell to cast *suggestion* on the PC, suggesting that the PC strip down and join her in a midnight swim. She waits for the PC to undress and dive into the ocean, at which point she uses her scroll of *summon nature's ally III* to summon a large shark to attack the swimming PC before she sneaks back to the hold to hide.

The Sinister Passenger

SKALD **CR 3**

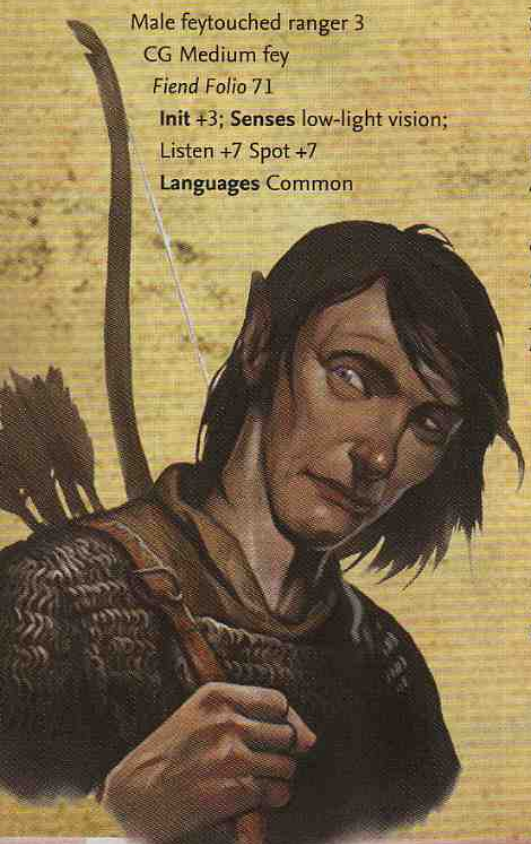
Male feytouched ranger 3

CG Medium fey

Fiend Folio 71

Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +7 Spot +7

Languages Common



AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14

hp 20 (3 HD)

Immune mind-affecting

Fort +4, **Ref** +6, **Will** +2

Spd 30 ft.

Melee scimitar +4 (1d6+1 /18–20)

Ranged *+1 composite longbow* +7 (1d8+2/×3) or *+1 composite longbow* +5/+5 (1d8+2/×3)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +4

Atk Options Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, favored enemy +2 (reptilian humanoids)

Combat Gear vial of acid (2)

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 3rd)

1/day—*charm person* (DC 11)

Abilities Str 12, Dex 17, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 10

SQ wild empathy +3

Feats Iron Will, Endurance, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Track

Skills Hide +11, Knowledge (geography) +6, Listen +7, Move Silently +5, Spot +7, Survival +7 (+9 when avoiding hazards or to keep from getting lost), Swim +7

Possessions combat gear, chain shirt, scimitar, *+1 composite longbow* (+2 STR) with 20 arrows, two unused tickets to the Lachrymal Theater in the Styes to see "Feasting Corpulence of Devils"

Skald is a shifty-looking, hunch-shouldered character with pale skin, a nasal voice, and unsettling eyes. Yet despite appearances, Sklad is an honorable and courageous man. A former advisor to corrupt Councilman Rashlen in the foul waterfront far to the northeast known as the Styes, Skald fled after discovering just how evil his boss was. In the process of fleeing the Styes, Skald torched one of Rashlen's warehouses (which, at the time, was being used to store a large amount of opiates).

Since his flight, Skald's dodged Rashlen's agents nonstop, and as a result has taken to jumping at shadows. Skald's gift for navigation and his eagerness to join the expedition (he asked only for room and board for the voyage) are the primary reasons Lavinia invited him along.

Skald's unusual appearance and morose attitude soon become the focus of rumor. When things start going wrong on the voyage, it's Skald many of the passengers blame for the ill luck. Yet while he begins the adventure as unfriendly, PCs who befriend him over the course of the voyage should find in him a loyal friend indeed.

Seduction 2: As seduction 1 above, except that Rowyn uses Disguise Spell to cast *hold person* on the PC. If successful, she coup de graces the character with one of his own weapons, leaving the body on the deck for others to find. If she fails to kill the character with the first strike, she drops the weapon and flees, reasoning that it's almost as damaging to the PC to leave him thinking his lover tried to kill him.

Accidents: Rowyn might use *invisiblity* to position herself so that she can cut a key rope that drops a yardarm or other heavy beam down upon a PC on the deck. The PC takes 3d6 points of damage, but can avoid all of the damage with a DC 15 Reflex save.

Opportunistic Strike: During any other shipboard combat, Rowyn uses *disguise self* or *invisibility* to take up a position where she can sneak attack a PC during the battle, using the chaos to escape back into hiding after she makes a single strike.

Rowyn Kellani **CR 8**
Female human rogue 3/bard 5
NE Medium humanoid
Init +2; **Senses** Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Aquan, Common, Draconic

AC* 20, touch 12, flat-footed 15
hp 38 (8 HD)
Fort +3, **Ref** +9, **Will** +4; evasion
*3-point Combat Expertise

Spd 30 ft.
Melee* *+1 rapier* +5 (1d6+1/19–20)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +5
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Feint, sneak attack +2d6
Special Actions bardic music 2/day (countersong, *fascinate*, inspire competence, inspire courage +1)
Combat Gear *pickled mephit*, scroll of *summon nature's ally III*
Spells Known (CL 5th)
2nd (2/day)—*invisibility*, *hold person* (DC 15), *suggestion* (DC 15)
1st (4/day)—*charm person* (DC 14), *cure light wounds*, *disguise self* (DC 14), *expeditious retreat*
0 (3/day)—*daze* (DC 13), *ghost sound* (DC 13), *mage hand*, *message*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*
*3-point Combat Expertise

Abilities Str 10, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 8, Cha 16
SQ bardic knowledge +7, trapfinding, trap sense +1
Feats Combat Expertise, Disguise Spell (see page 55), Improved Feint, Weapon Finesse
Skills Balance +12, Bluff +10, Diplomacy +14, Hide +10, Intimidate +4, Jump +12, Knowledge (local) +8, Move Silently +15, Perform (dance) +13, Sense Motive +7, Sleight of Hand +12, Swim +8, Tumble +14, Use Magic Device +11
Possessions combat gear, *+1 leather armor*, *+1 buckler*, *+1 rapier*, *boots of elvenkind*, *pickled mephit*, 3 doses of arsenic

Tactics: Eventually, the PCs should realize they have someone on board who's trying to do them in. There's only a certain number of places Rowyn can hide on board, so once the PCs start searching, they should find her soon enough. When caught, Rowyn curses the PCs vehemently, blaming them for her ruin and promising them all painful deaths. If she has a chance before combat begins, she begins to dance so she can cast a disguised *suggestion* or *hold person* without being obvious. She uses Improved Feint to sneak attack foes during combat. If brought below 10 hit points, she tries to escape. She might try to murder a passenger and then use *disguise self* to pose as that passenger for a short time to give her a chance to strike at the PCs again, but in the end Rowyn knows she's cornered. She'd rather fight to the death than be captured.

Rowyn Kellani has no further role to play in the Savage Tide Adventure Path—her eventual fate is left to the PCs.

PART THREE: THE VOYAGE SOUTH

The map of the expedition's voyage lists several locations along the way at which preset encounters occur. If you wish to liven up the journey between these encounters, feel free to check for wandering monsters every day. Along the coast, there's a 28% chance per day of an encounter. Once the expedition heads out into the open sea, there's only an 8% chance per day of an encounter. If an encounter occurs, there's a 30% chance it's with another ship (50% chance of being friendly); otherwise use the encounter table on page 92 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* or the EL 5 encounter for Warm Marine encounters on page 216 of *Stormwrack* to determine what peril stumbles into the PCs.

Minor Encounters

In addition to the keyed encounters of the voyage, several minor encounters are presented here as well. These encounters are little more than descriptions of strange events with the exact details left to you to determine.

Coastal Fort: Forts are common sights along the Amedio coast up until encounter E, after which no more forts are to be found. The majority of these forts are held by the Scarlet Brotherhood (a sprawling organization of sinister monks and assassins), and are used as staging points for expeditions into the jungle interior. Lavinia avoids these forts, and often takes the expedition out further to sea as she passes them by to avoid any possible conflict. Two forts are not held

Rowyn

by the Scarlet Brotherhood—Fort Blackwell (detailed in encounter A) and Fort Greenrock (detailed in encounter E).

The Great Web: For several miles, the ships pass several enormous spider webs which cling to the boughs of the great jungle trees. Huge black shapes lie within the webs. PCs stopping in this area or sailing beneath these trees (which stretch forty feet over the ocean) encounter dozens of hungry monstrous spiders of all sizes.

The Sacred Forest: These ten miles of jungle coastline are home to vast Kapok trees. A DC 20 Spot check allows a character to notice the hundreds of tribal ornaments in the trees, as well as numerous desiccated corpses of lizardfolk hanging from the boughs. These trees are filled with strange fetishes, masks, and totems, and a DC 25 Search check (made over the course of an hour) nets 3d6 gp of loot. Characters stepping too far into the jungle here risk the wrath of whatever strange tribe erected the fetishes, be they savage humanoids, lizardfolk, or worse...

Ruins: Now and then, the PCs may spot glimpses of ancient civilization—the vine-clad remnants of strange humanoid statues of great size, the crumbling forms of immense ziggurat temples, or the teetering stone ruins of villages. While any of these ruins could promise treasure or adventure, Lavinia would rather ignore them for now. She's promised Urol Forol a stop at the mightiest of these ruins, and doesn't want to waste additional time along the way.

The Vast Burning: The expedition passes a huge blackened valley along the jungle shore. Closer inspection reveals that this was a vast sacrificial pit into which hundreds of what look like humanoid apes were thrown. The sacrifice took place a decade or more ago, but birds and plants do not touch the place. The pit has nothing to do with this adventure, but you could develop it further if you wish.

Wyvern Sighting: A flock of six wyverns swoop down to fly alongside the *Sea Wyvern* for ten minutes, cavorting in the skies above and occasionally swooping down to skip their talons or wing tips across the ocean surface. A few might come close to the ship or curiously look over her wyvern-shaped figurehead, but as long as the PCs don't attack, the wyverns eventually wing off to the port side and are gone.

Sea Monster: Have the PCs make Spot checks. Whoever rolls the highest notices something strange in the water several hundred feet out—a sinuous shape, perhaps, or possibly a brief flash of an immense black mass. If this occurs at night the shape might glow in the dark. Perhaps the PC sees, for the briefest of moments, an immense

The Curious Scholar

UROL FOROL **CR 3**
Male gnome druid 1/expert 3
NG Small humanoid
Init +1; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +12, Spot +10
Languages Common, Draconic, Druidic, Gnome, Sylvan

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 14
hp 26 (4 HD)
Fort +5, **Ref** +2, **Will** +8 (+10 vs. illusion)

Spd 20 ft.
Melee quarterstaff +1 (1d4–2)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** –4
Combat Gear *wand of shillelagh* (32 charges),
Spells Prepared (CL 1st)
1st—*calm animals* (DC 14), *obscuring mist*
0—*mending, purify food and drink, resistance*
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 1st)
1/day—*dancing lights, ghost sound* (DC 10), *prestidigitation, speak with animals*

Abilities Str 6, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 10
SQ animal companion (crow named Miss Crazzle), wild empathy +1
Feats Skill Focus (Knowledge [geography]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [nature])
Skills Concentration +6, Handle Animal +7, Knowledge (geography) +12, Knowledge (history) +4, Knowledge (nature) +16, Listen +12, Spot +10, Survival +12
Possessions combat gear, *+1 leather armor*, quarterstaff, *cloak of resistance +1*, two doses of *stone salve*, collection of snakes and spiders, sleeping cap for Miss Crazzle

Urol is a bent old gnome who constantly squints when he looks. He carries the odor of the land about with him, an odor that most find not too pleasant. He is talkative and chipper except when the subject of the natural world comes up, whereupon he flies into a frenzy of excited stuttering bliss, expounding upon obscure and often strangely fascinating (to him, at least) bits of lore.

Urol has actually been to the Isle of Dread before, although his stay, in his words, was, "Unfortunately short—due to events beyond my control, I might add! We've certainly nothing to fear this time around!" He demanded to be part of Lavinia's expedition when he learned about it, and indeed his knowledge of the Isle could greatly help the colonists of Farshore. Urol has a strange fascination with poisonous creatures, and his nerve-wracking collection of spiders and snakes is often the subject of whispered talk on the *Sea Wyvern*.

Urol frequently evokes Amella's anger during the voyage, despite his best efforts to win her friendship. As the weeks go by, it may fall to the PCs to keep him out of her hair.

eye the size of a tower shield staring back at him before the shape sinks back into the deep. This sighting of some unknown sea monster shouldn't lead to combat, but it should serve to keep the PCs on edge for a few days to come.

A: Fort Blackwell

Distance from Sasserine: 475 miles
Time from Sasserine: 13 days

This small settlement of approximately 2,000 is located near the northernmost tip of the peninsula known to sailors as "The Hook." One of the few coastal Amedio forts not controlled by the Scarlet Brotherhood (its distance from the Amedio interior makes it not worth the effort for the Brotherhood to control), Fort Blackwell remains an independently governed walled town perched on the edge of civilization.

Fort Blackwell is a cozy town with a tiny harbor protected by an immense sea gate hung between two squat towers. Before any ship is allowed within the harbor, a troop of Blackwell guards must be allowed to search the ship and interview its captain. Fortunately, years of relative peace and being ignored by both the Scarlet Brotherhood and the Crimson Fleet (who maintain larger ports of call in various forts elsewhere along the coast—forts wisely avoided by the expedition) have made them rather lackadaisical in their searches, and barring anything outwardly suspicious performed by the PCs, the guards allow their expedition entrance into the harbor after a mere 15-minute inspection.

Although Lavinia intends to stay only one night in Fort Blackwell, she defers to the PCs if they wish to stay longer. She points out to the PCs that it'll probably be seven weeks before they reach Fort Greenrock, the next friendly location where they'll be able to resupply, so she encourages them to get all their shopping done here if they can.

Fort Blackwell features numerous small and cozy inns and taverns, all of which serve a delicious local malt blend of whiskey called The Green Man (10 gp per bottle). Food and supplies can be readily purchased from one of four large provisioners who keep warehouses on the waterfront. Several small shrines, including ones dedicated to Hieroneous, Kord, Pelor, St. Cuthbert, and the gods of the sea (Procan, Osprem, and Xerbo), can be found here as well.

Yet there are hidden dangers in Fort Blackwell. The Scarlet Brotherhood has several spies in town to keep an eye on things. A hidden sea cave just north of town once used by smugglers has become the lair of a family of sinister fey known as redcaps (*Monster Manual III* 138) led by a foul-mouthed father named Kabouttermannekin who sometimes sneaks into the fort to cause problems. And the shrine of Hieroneous is in fact a cover for a cult of slaadi worshipers who call themselves the Wizards of the Hopping Prophet. These cultists have a terrible fate in store for poor Conrad Horst, who stays the night at the shrine while the PCs are in port here (see Event 3).

Any of these perils could rear their head during the PCs' stay if you wish to expand the adventure—otherwise, the stay here should be short.

Fort Blackwell (Small Town): AL NG; 800 gp limit; Assets 4,480 gp; Population 1,123; Conventional; Isolated (human 90%, half-elf 7%, others 3%).

Authority Figure: **Governess Juliana Terwall** (NG female human aristocrat 4/ranger 2).

B: Hungry Flotsam (EL 6)

Distance from Sasserine: 785 miles
Distance from Fort Blackwell: 310 miles
Time from Fort Blackwell: 9 days

As the PCs near the mouth of the Havekihu River, the expedition has its first real encounter with poor weather. The ships anchor near the river and take half a day to refill water stores on board from the river's waters (as they do upon reaching the next three rivers along their route). Near the evening, less than a half hour after the expedition gets under way again, a thick fog springs up. A DC 15 Knowledge (nature) check confirms that fog banks like this often occur along the coast in this region, but the thickness is nevertheless oppressive. Passengers head below deck, and the crew grows silent as all ears strain to the starboard side, marking the distant

sound of breakers on the shore as the only trustworthy method of ensuring the expedition doesn't draw too close to the shallows while still staying parallel to the coast. The fog grows thicker, and soon even the *Blue Nixie*, only a few hundred feet ahead, is lost to vision.

At this point, Lavinia orders the ships to anchor for the night until the fog burns off in the morning. The voice of one of her crew calling out from the fog to the *Sea Wyvern* announcing the short stoppage is curiously muted by the fog, but nonetheless easily understood. The PCs should anchor the *Sea Wyvern* as well, and prepare themselves for a long night.

Creatures: Of course, the fog is far from uninhabited. At some point in the night, the entire ship lurches as if striking a reef. In fact, the ship has been attacked by a dangerous aquatic predator called a flotsam ooze. This ooze has been drifting on ocean currents for several weeks, an enormous glob of transparent protoplasm that exudes a powerful adhesive that causes driftwood, animal carcasses, ship fragments, rocks, and other objects to cling to its surface. To the untrained eye, such an ooze floating on the sea looks like nothing more than a clot of flotsam adrift in the current.

The ooze itself is fifteen feet in diameter, and the lurching sensation was caused not by the *Sea Wyvern* hitting bottom, but by the ooze attaching itself to the hull as it prepares to slither up to search for prey.

Enormous Flotsam Ooze **CR 6**

N Huge ooze (aquatic)
Fiend Folio 17
Init +0; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft.; Listen –5, Spot –5

AC 14, touch 6, flat-footed 14; transparent
hp 115 (7 HD)
Immune ooze traits
Fort +13, **Ref** +0, **Will** –3

Spd 10 ft., swim 30 ft.
Melee slam +13 (2d6+15)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +23
Atk Options adhesive

Abilities Str 30, Dex 6, Con 32, Int —, Wis 1, Cha 1
SQ amphibious
Skills Hide –2, Swim +18

Adhesive (Ex) A flotsam ooze exudes a sticky slime that holds fast any creature or item touching it. It automatically grapples any creature it hits with its slam attack, and a grappled opponent cannot escape as long as the ooze lives unless the adhesive is weakened by soap or lye (in which case the ooze makes a standard grapple check to maintain a hold). A flotsam ooze can make one additional slam attack each

The Tomboy Warrior

Lirith Veldirose CR 3
Female human rogue 1/fighter 2
CN Medium humanoid
Complete Warrior 12
Init +6; **Senses** Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Common

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14
hp 20 (3 HD)
Fort +4, **Ref** +4, **Will** –1

Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk falchion +6 (2d4+3/18–20)
Ranged mwk composite longbow +5 (1d8★2/×3)
Base Atk +2; **Grp** +4
Atk Options sneak attack +1d6
Combat Gear *potion of cat's grace, potion of cure moderate wounds, potion of jump, potion of expeditious retreat*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 15, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 12
SQ trapfinding
Feats Acrobatic, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (falchion)
Skills Balance +9, Climb +6, Bluff +5, Intimidate +7, Jump +12, Sense Motive +3, Swim +7, Tumble +11, Use Rope +6
Possessions combat gear, *+1 studded leather armor*, masterwork falchion, masterwork composite longbow (+2 Str) with 20 arrows, sapphire nose ring worth 450 gp, silver bracelet worth 150 gp, coral ring that looks like an octopus worth 500 gp

A red-haired tomboy who wears flamboyant scarves and silks, Lirith has been a sailor for the past year. Lirith intends to work hard while she can, then retire early to some fabulous island. Above all, Lirith loves to show off, particularly in combat. She loves to Tumble, Balance, and fight using Bluff and Intimidate checks to ensure everyone notices her.

Lirith's greatest secret is the fact that she was actually born Lirith Annamander, the daughter of a minor noble from the city of Verbobonc, far to the north. Her need for attention stems from a childhood spent in the shadow of several talented older siblings. At the age of 15, she ran away from home and eventually ended up in Sasserine, taking a new name to hide her past. Yet sometimes she misses the comforts of noble life, and as a result she puts material needs above emotional needs—her eyes are drawn to precious things. Anyone who openly displays wealth and is particularly good-looking is likely to be in for romantic intrigue.

round against any creature stuck to it. A weapon that strikes a flotsam ooze sticks fast unless the wielder makes a DC 12 Reflex save. A DC 16 Strength check allows a character to remove an item stuck to the ooze. These two checks are static, and do not change if the ooze's ability scores or total Hit Dice change.

Transparent (Ex) A flotsam ooze is transparent in water, and receives concealment while swimming (50% miss chance).

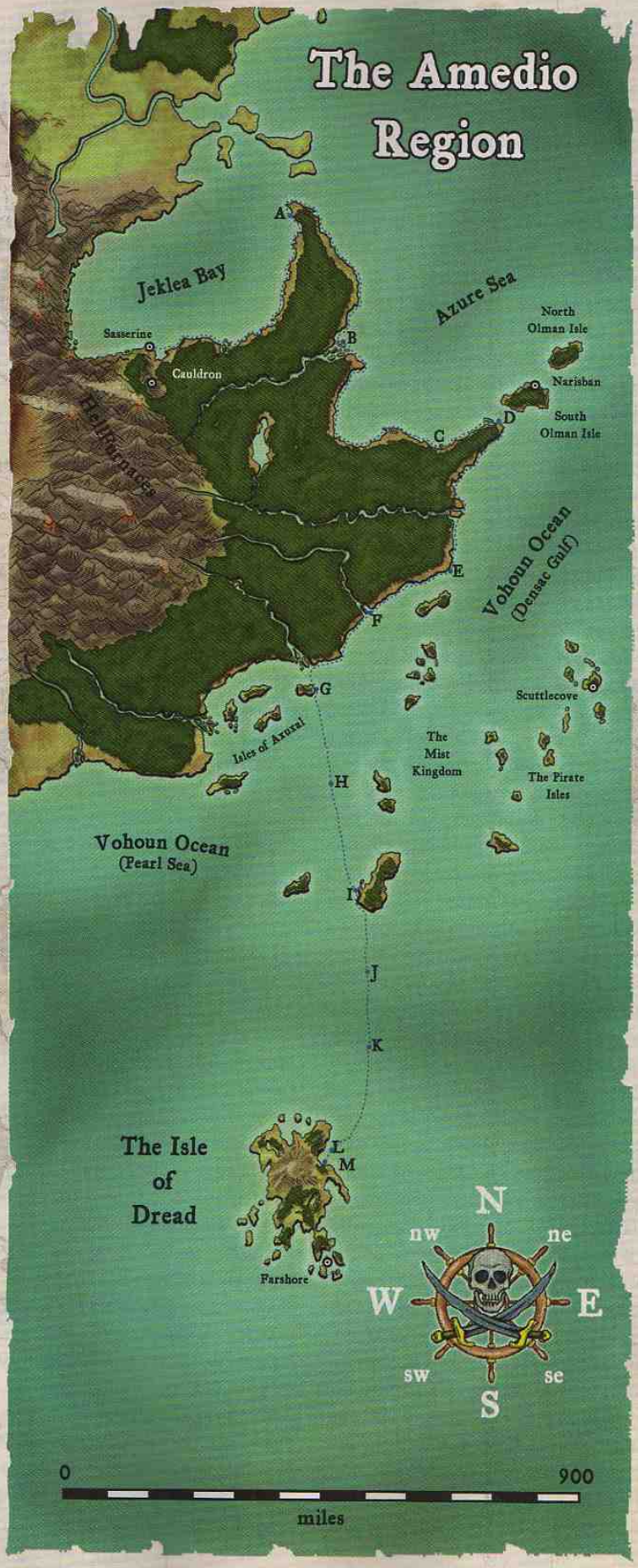
Tactics: The flotsam ooze is aquatic, and as such it does not leave the water once it's attached itself to the *Sea Wyvern's* hull. Its weight causes the ship to list slightly to the port. Attached to the hull just left of the stairs leading up to the bow, anyone who leans over the rail on the port side can see what appears to be a huge pile of flotsam clinging to the hull. The ooze can attack any target that comes within ten feet of the bottom of the stairs along the port side of the ship. Any creature it grabs is pulled overboard if it fails an opposed Strength check—in any event, the ooze can make a free slam attack against such a foe each round.

Treasure: The flotsam ooze floats once it's slain, the driftwood and debris that once coated it slowly sinking or drifting away. If a DC 20 Search is made of the ooze within one minute of its death, a character finds that among the debris are no less than six bodies of hapless sailors. It's unclear if they were merchants or pirates, as their bodies are little more than bone by now, but one of the bodies still wears a *ring of mind shielding* and another wears *gauntlets of ogre power*. After a minute, these treasures sink to the bottom 40 feet below, where a DC 30 Search can find them.

C: Tamoachan

Distance from Sasserine: 1,285 miles
Distance from Havekihu River: 500 miles
Time from Havekihu River: 14 days

Lavinia promised Urol Forol a chance to explore the ruins of the infamous Tamoachan ruins, and asks the PCs to accompany him on this short side expedition. Continue with Part Four.



D: Brotherhood Blockade (EL 6)

Distance from Sasserine: 1,435 miles
Distance from Tamoachan: 500 miles
Time from Tamoachan: 4 days

As the expedition approaches the tip of the Tamoachan peninsula, Lavinia draws the *Blue Nixie* up alongside the *Sea Wyvern* to speak to the PCs. She informs them that the next several miles will be among the most dangerous of their journey, as they must now thread the neeedle and sail through a Scarlet Brotherhood blockade. For many years, the Brotherhood has maintained a strong presence on South Olman Isle, particularly the city of Narisban. Although their navy has grown lax in their once-stict patrols of the region, Brotherhood ships are still common in the sound between the peninsula and South Olman Isle. Lavinia suggests that, in order to minimize the chances of their expedition being spotted, the *Blue Nixie* and the *Sea Wyvern* should sail through the sound seperately, about a half hour apart, to meet up again on the southern side. She defers to the PCs' opinion in the matter, though—if they think it'd be best to stick together, she agrees.

Creature: Unfortunately, the Brotherhood spots the PCs no matter what as they sail hurriedly around the horn. If the *Sea Wyvern* has allowed the *Blue Nixie* to go ahead of her, the *Blue Nixie* makes it through but the *Sea Wyvern* is spotted by a Brotherhood caravel. If the two ships sailed together, a pair of Brotherhood ships spot them, in which case each ship becomes locked in its own battle.

These ships are privateers charged by the Scarlet Brotherhood to capture any ships they spot sailing these waters, claim the cargo as spoils, and claim the crew as slaves (or worse) to be brought to Narisban. The ship that accosts the *Sea Wyvern* is a ragged caravel named *Purity's Prow*, captained by an equally ragged man named Lars "No-Neck" Helvur. Captain Helvur hails the *Sea Wyvern* as he sails toward the ship, informing the crew that he means to board her for "inspection." *Purity's Prow* flies the Scarlet Brotherhood flag, but even if no one on board the *Sea Wyvern* makes a DC 15 Knowledge (local) check (which calls up tales of how Brotherhood ships are little better than pirates in these waters), the evil and sinister look of Helvur's crew of nine thugs and cutthroats should leave little doubt that the *Sea Wyvern* is about to come under attack.

Lars "No-Neck" Helvur CR 4
Male human rogue 2/fighter 2
CE Medium humanoid
Init +5; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +0
Languages Common

AC 16, touch 11, flat-footed 15
hp 30 (4 HD)
Fort +5, **Ref** +4, **Will** +0; evasion

Spd 30 ft.
Melee mwk scimitar +8 (1d6+4/18–20)
Ranged heavy crossbow +4 (1d10/19–20)
Base Atk +3; **Grp** +6
Atk Options sneak attack +1d6
Combat Gear *elixir of fire breath* (2), *potion of cure moderate wounds*

Abilities Str 16, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 13
SQ trapfinding
Feats Athletic, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Intimidate), Weapon Focus (scimitar)
Skills Balance +8, Bluff +6, Climb +10, Intimidate +8, Jump +10, Knowledge (geography) +0, Profession (sailor) +5, Swim +8, Tumble +8
Possessions combat gear, +1 *studded leather armor*, masterwork scimitar, buckler, heavy crossbow with 10 bolts, gold ring worth 120 gp

Pirate (9) CR 1/2
Male and female human warrior 1
CE Medium humanoid
Init +0; **Senses** Listen –1, Spot –1
Languages Common

AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13
hp 8 (1 HD)
Fort +3, **Ref** +2 **Will** –1

Spd 30 ft.
Melee rapier +2 (1d6+1/18–20)
Ranged light crossbow +1 (1d8/19–20)
Base Atk +1; **Grp** +2

Abilities Str 13, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8
Feats Athletic, Toughness
Skills Climb +3, Profession (sailor) +3, Swim +5
Possessions leather armor, buckler, rapier, light crossbow with 10 bolts, earring worth 15 gp

Purity's Prow
Caravel class sailing ship
Seaworthiness +0; **Shiphandling** –1
Speed 30 ft. in normal wind

AC –3, hull 3, rigging 1
Hull 24 sections; Hardness 5; hp 80 (currently 40)
Rigging 2 sections; Hardness 0; hp 80 (currently 40)
Ram 4d6 per 10 feet of speed
Armament 2 ballistas (10 bolts each)

Tactics: Although they look tough, the crew of *Purity's Prow* is actually fairly desperate. They've been at sea for months, unable to return to port for repairs or supplies until they've made their quota of slaves and booty. With no slaves and slim treasure, a premature return to Narisban is an invitation for execution.

If the PCs attack the pirates before they have a chance to board, refer to page 21 for quick rules for naval combat (or use those provided in *Stormwrack*). If the PCs let the pirates approach, they pull up alongside the *Sea Wyvern*, toss several ropes with grappling hooks over to secure the ships together, and lower planks to aid in the boarding process. It's a DC 10 Balance check to cross on a plank, or a DC 15 Jump check to leap from one deck to the other.

Once on board the *Sea Wyvern*, Captain Helvur demands the PCs drop their weapons and hold still while he has his crew tie everyone up. If no one resists, the passengers and crew are loaded onto *Purity's Prow* and shipped to Narisban for a fate beyond the scope of this adventure.

Helver and his thugs do their best in combat, fighting together to reduce opponents' opportunity for flanking. As soon as Helver is slain, or as soon as six pirates are dropped, the remaining pirates panic and attempt to flee back to *Purity's Prow*, cutting the ropes that lock the ships together as they go and then attempting to flee.

Treasure: A search of *Purity's Prow's* hold reveals the cause of Captain Helver's desperate attack on the *Sea Wyvern*—they've managed to gather only 1,150 gp in booty (consisting of coins, a few bags of flawed gems, and several pieces of jewelry, all kept in one large trunk). The ship has only about a

week's worth of food, most of it spoiled or infested with weevils.

Development: If the *Blue Nixie* and the *Sea Wyvern* attempted the crossing together, the *Blue Nixie* is accosted by a second ship (the *Nightshark*). There's no need to play out this second combat—simply assume that whatever fate the PCs meet in their altercation with *Purity's Prow* is mirrored by the *Blue Nixie*.

E: Ruins of Fort Greenrock

Distance from Sasserine: 1,765 miles
Distance from the Brotherhood Blockade: 330 miles
Time from the Brotherhood Blockade: 9 days

Although Lavinia had hoped to be able to resupply food stores at Fort Greenrock, it becomes obvious as soon as the expedition rounds the last coastal bend before this remote colony of monks and druids that something terrible has happened. The wooden pallisade surrounding the fort has been torn apart, and the fort itself has burned to the ground. It appears that whatever grim fate visited the place occurred several months ago, for no sign of life or activity can be seen from shore.

If the PCs investigate, they find further evidence of a great battle. Dried blood stains the timbers of collapsed buildings here and there, broken weapons lie in the sand, and hundreds of black-feathered arrows decorate the sides of the ruins that face the jungle. A DC 25 Knowledge (nature) check reveals the workmanship on these arrows as having come from lizardfolk.

No stores remain in Fort Greenrock, nor are there any survivors. The savage tribe of lizardfolk who brought ruin to this once-idyllic waystation have long since returned to the depths of the Amedio. Lavinia urges the PCs to press on, saying that they'll have one final opportunity to restock supplies at the village of Renkrue on the Axuxal Isles in about ten days.

E: River Menace (EL 6)

Distance from Sasserine: 1,925 miles
Distance from Fort Greenrock: 160 miles
Time from Fort Greenrock: 4 days

As with Havekihu River and Xatalati River before, the expedition stops here at the mouth of Atikula River to refresh the supplies of fresh water. Unlike the previous two rivers, the point where the Atikula reaches the sea is marked by a magnificent 900-foot-wide waterfall that cascades two hundred feet over a cliff into the ocean below. With no beach nearby to speak of, it's easy enough for a ship to sail in fairly close and then send out a rowboat with barrels to fill. There's only room in the narrow harbor for one ship at a time, and Lavinia graciously offers to let the *Sea Wyvern* go first, unaware of the peril that waits within.

As with the previous stops like this, refilling the stores takes about half a day. While the stores are being refilled, some of the passengers may be tempted to take advantage of the secluded and calm cove's waters to enjoy a swim.

Creature: The deep pool below the waterfall is far from uninhabited, as anyone who decides to take a swim quickly learns. Even if no one tempts fate in this manner, the aquatic seven-headed hydra that lives below swims up to investigate the strange shapes floating on the water above not long after it's the *Sea Wyvern's* turn to refill the water barrels. The hydra happens to choose the largest concentration of PCs for its attack, surging up from the depths below and exploding with a tremendous spray of water as it strikes. This hydra is identical to the seven-headed hydra detailed in the *Monster Manual*, save that it has the aquatic subtype. The hydra fights to the death to protect its territory.

Aquatic Seven-Headed Hydra: hp 77; *Monster Manual* 156.

Treasure: Anyone who dives down to investigate the harbor bed below finds a grim scene—dozens of sunken ships of all sizes rot in the mud and seaweed here, previous victims of the hydra. A DC 20 Search of the wrecks reveals that most of the cargo has long since rotted away as well, but an hour's worth of exploration is enough to turn up 102 gp in a partially collapsed chest, a suit of +1 *chainmail* on a long-dead elf in one of the sunken ships' staterooms, and draped over a drooping yardarm, a bright green *cloak of the manta ray*.

G: Renkrue

Distance from Sasserine: 2,140 miles
Distance from Fort Greenrock: 215 miles
Time from Fort Greenrock: 6 days

The Isles of Axuxal lie off the southern coastline of the Amedio Jungle, and are settled by several peaceful Olman Tribes. The village of Renkrue, the easternmost settlement on the isles, is also the most advanced, consisting of a collection of straw huts and even a few wooden structures built years ago by an ambitious priest of St. Cuthbert who had visions of converting the islanders to his religion. He died not long after seeing to the construction of the village's two buildings; these buildings now serve as the chieftain's hut and a communal hall respectively.

The residents of Renkrue are friendly and chatty, although only a few of them speak Common. Up to ten tons of food can be purchased here, using trade stock from the *Blue Nixie* Lavinia brought for just this purpose. In addition, the PCs can purchase potions, scrolls, wands, and other magic items that aren't made of worked metal here, up to the village's gold piece limit.

Lavinia suggests the expedition takes a day of shore leave on Renkrue. There's little danger here, and it might give the PCs a good chance to roleplay further with the NPCs they've been sailing with for the past several weeks in an environment different than the cramped quarters of a ship. Sample reactions for the key NPCs on the expedition are listed below.

Amella Venkalie: Amella would prefer to remain on board the *Sea Wyvern*, but if she's developing a relationship with a PC she could be convinced to take some time away from the ship.

Conrad Horst: If he lives this long, Conrad may decide to retire here, his recent brush with death having given him a new outlook on life. Unless persuaded otherwise, he gives his goodbyes to the PCs when they resume their journey.

Avner Meravanchi: Initially charmed by the quaint village, Avner quickly becomes obsessed with one of the village daughters. His attempts to "purchase"

her from her parents insults the islanders to such an extent that they refuse to continue trade with the expedition unless the PCs can smooth things over with a DC 25 Diplomacy check, at which point Avener loses interest in the village and its residents and spends the rest of shore leave onboard the *Sea Wyvern* in a foul mood.

Skald: Intrigued by the island, Skald spends his time exploring the relatively safe interior during his stay. PCs who suspect him of being a villain may be suspicious of his desire to spend shore leave alone.

Urol Forol: Urol couldn't care less about the village of Renkrue, but he quickly becomes obsessed with the wide variety of life to be found in the extensive tide pools that line the nearby shores. He spends hours exploring these pools, scribbling in his notes and squealing with delight at each new discovery.

Lirith Veldirose: Lirith enjoys her time with the people of Renkrue, and that evening gets quite drunk during an impromptu drinking contest with one of the locals (or perhaps with a PC). If she gets drunk enough, she may challenge a PC to a mock duel (during which she gains a +2 bonus to her Constitution but a –2 penalty to her Dexterity due to her inebriation).

Rowyn Kellani: If she still lives, Rowyn attempts an assassination of a PC during the shore leave.

Tavey Nesk: As cabin boy, Tavey is expected to stay on board and watch the ship. If the PCs let him come with them and leave the ship unguarded, nothing bad happens to the ship.

The *Blue Nixie*: Although both ships take shore leave at the same time, the passengers and crew of the *Blue Nixie* generally keep to themselves and do not mix much with those of the *Sea Wyvern*. The notable exceptions are Lavinia Vanderboren and the Jade Ravens. If any PCs have already established relationships with any of these NPCs, this encounter is a great time to continue such rivalries or romances.

Renkrue (Village): AL CG; 200 gp limit; Assets 7,800 gp; Population 780; Conventional; Isolated (human 100%)

Authority Figure: **Chief Ixawhani, He Who Sleeps With Sound** (ranger 4).

H: The Pearl Current

Distance from Sasserine: 2,290 miles
Distance from Renkrue: 150 miles
Time from Renkrue: 4 days

This section of ocean contains a hidden peril—the Pearl Current. This swift-flowing oceanic current sweeps up from the southern Vohoun Ocean to the northeast toward the Densac Gulf, and can carry unprepared ships hundreds of miles off course with ease. Lavinia's charts indicate the presence of the Pearl Current, but determining when and where it starts and ends is a trickier prospect, as the current's exact shape and width vary.

Once the PCs reach this area, the daily piloting checks to remain on course become more difficult, rising to DC 21. This check rises to DC 23 after one day's failed check, and to DC 27 after two days of failed checks. Characters who aren't careful can be caught up in the current for days or even weeks as they fight to cross through the current. After a total of three successful checks (not necessarily consecutive), the expedition sails clear of the current, at which point the base piloting check drops back to DC 17.

I: Ruja

Distance from Sasserine: 2,505 miles
Distance from Renkrue: 215 miles
Time from Renkrue: 6 days

After nearly two weeks on the open sea, land once again looms on the horizon. For a moment, the PCs may think they've reached the Isle of Dread ahead of schedule, but in truth they've only spotted the island of Ruja, an uninhabited island surrounded by perilous 1,000-foot-high cliffs and crowned with a tangle of thick jungle. Rumors have long held that Ruja is the lair of some form of terrible monster, yet the difficulty of even reaching the jungle peaks above have ensured that the isle's interior has remained unexplored.

The expedition is not scheduled to stop at Ruja—instead, its southwestern cliffs serve as a last landmark on the way to the Isle of Dread. Beyond these cliffs, only 500 miles of open sea lie between the PCs and their goal.

If the PCs wish to explore Ruja, this is an excellent place to expand the adventure. As long as the *Sea Wyvern* (and thus, by extension, the *Blue Nixie*) has enough food stores to make the last two weeks of the voyage, Lavinia has no qualms about stopping for a few days here to let the PCs scratch their itch for exploration. Unfortunately, the interior of Ruja is hardly worth the peril; the jungle peaks are the lairs of relatively unintelligent monsters like rocs, terror birds, monstrous vermin, and oozes. The most intelligent denizens of the Ruja heights are several tribes of bickering Large ettercaps. There is little in the way of treasure waiting to be discovered here.

J: The First Storm

Distance from Sasserine: 2,665 miles
Distance from Ruja: 160 miles
Time from Ruja: 4 days

Up until this point, the expedition has been lucky—they've had clear weather without a storm in sight. That luck ends as they reach this stretch of the Vohoun Ocean. Late at night, the wind whips into a frenzy, and by dawn, the ships are caught in a full-fledged storm. The *Sea Wyvern's* captain must make a DC 20 Profession (sailor) check to maintain control of the ship; failure indicates that the ship is driven off course by the storm. The storm itself has severe winds, but the *Sea Wyvern* is large enough that it weathers the storm well. The next morning, the skies remain cloudy but the wind dies down once again. If the ship was driven off course, the PCs must spend a day getting back on course (after making a DC 19 Knowledge [geography] check to navigate the route).

Unfortunately, the storm has had another effect. The *Blue Nixie* is nowhere to be seen. Lavinia's standing orders in this case to continue on to Farshore and reunite there if the ships get separated should encourage the PCs onward, even though they have no idea if the *Blue Nixie* made it through the storm intact. In fact, the other ship did, but was driven further south and damaged. Lavinia's new course takes her around the west side of the Isle,

and if the PCs contact her somehow (such as via a *sending* spell) she lets them know she and her crew are okay, and that they should continue on their way to Farshore.

K: Journey's End

Distance from Sasserine: 2,815 miles
Distance from the First Storm: 150 miles
Time from the First Storm: 4 days

Cut off from the *Blue Nixie*, the *Sea Wyvern* continues south. At this point in her journey, she encounters one of the most notorious perils of the Vohoun Ocean—Journey's End. Continue with Part Five.

L: The Second Storm (EL 6)

Distance from Sasserine: 3,000 miles
Distance from Journey's End: 185 miles
Time from Journey's End: 5 days

Only five days after the *Sea Wyvern* escapes the clutches of the living sargasso, she encounters her greatest threat yet.

As the sun dawns, the day is overcast and grim. Have the PCs make Spot checks—whoever gets the highest result notices something off the starboard bow: land. The ragged, jungle-choked peaks of the Isle of Dread loom on the horizon. The sight of land brings a cheer from the crew and passengers, and consultation with the sea charts confirms it—the *Sea Wyvern* has nearly reached her goal. All that remains is to sail down the eastern coast to Farshore.

Alas, by the time morning becomes noon, it should be obvious that fate has something else in store for the ship. The rain begins shortly thereafter, and by 2:00 a second storm is in full force. This one is much more powerful than the first—not quite a hurricane, but close. The *Sea Wyvern's* captain must make a DC 30 Profession (sailor) check to stay on course. In addition, the captain must make a DC 15 Profession (sailor) check every hour to avoid rolling or washing (50% chance of either on a failed check).

A roll is when the ship rocks violently to the side as it slides down the face of a large swell, only to rock back to the other direction upon reaching the next swell. Anyone on deck who isn't lashed to something solid must make a DC 12 Balance check or a DC 15 Strength check to avoid falling and sliding toward the edge of a ship. A sliding character can save himself from falling overboard with a DC 12 Reflex check.

A wash is when the ship plows into an oncoming swell, causing a powerful rush of surf to wash over the deck. This occurs 1d6 times before the ship rights itself, and with each wash, any character on deck further toward the bow than the central mast must make a DC 12 Balance check or DC 15 Strength check to avoid being washed overboard; these characters do not get a "last chance" Reflex save to avoid this fate.

Once overboard, it's a DC 20 Swim check to stay afloat. A character washed

overboard starts 1d3×10 feet away from the ship, and drifts a further 1d3×10 feet away each round. Swimming back to the *Sea Wyvern* may be impossible.

At sunset, after the *Sea Wyvern's* captain has made four checks to avoid rolling or washing, a tremendous lurch strikes the ship and the sound of splintering wood fills the air. The ship comes to a sudden stop, and everyone on board must make a DC 12 Reflex save to avoid falling prone. The ship has run aground on Masher Reef, about 25 miles northeast of the Isle of Dread. Waves crash against the ship, which now lists perilously to port, but as long as the ship remains grounded, the captain need not make Profession (sailor) checks to avoid a roll or wash.

Creature: Unfortunately, the creatures for which Masher Reef got its name do not take kindly to intruders upon their territory. Only a few rounds after the ship strikes the reef, a huge eel-like fish called a masher explodes from the water. The creature strikes at anyone on deck, attempting to make a quick meal of the intruders.

Masher: hp 68; see Appendix.

Tactics: The masher continues to fight until brought below 20 hit points, at which point it flees back underwater. Characters who move about on the listing deck must spend 2 squares of movement per square if they head "uphill" toward starboard, and anyone running or charging "downhill" toward port must make a DC 12 Balance check to avoid falling. A character who falls ends up in the five-foot-deep water atop Masher Reef.

The ship's captain can make a DC 20 Profession (sailor) check once every minute to attempt to dislodge the *Sea Wyvern* from Masher Reef. Every minute, there's a cumulative 10% chance another masher erupts from the waters to attack.

Development: Once the captain gets the ship off the reef, he must make another 1d6 DC 15 Profession (sailor) checks to avoid rolls or washes. After this, the storm abates somewhat, but the damage is done. Striking the reef has holed the ship in several places, and only by putting the entire crew to work at bailing can she stay afloat. As the night grows darker, the *Sea Wyvern* is in poor shape indeed—continue with Encounter M.

M: Shipwrecked on the Isle of Dread

Distance from Sasserine: 3,025 miles
Distance from the Second Storm: 25 miles
Time from the Second Storm: 1 day

After surviving the second storm, the *Sea Wyvern* is in bad shape. At this point, continue with Concluding the Adventure.

PART FOUR: TAMOACHAN

The jungle claimed this city centuries ago, and now her mysterious stone buildings, towering ziggurats, and rubble-strewn streets have fallen to the creeping vines and towering trees. Built in a bygone age by the Olmans, Tamoachan today is one of the greatest lures for adventurers in the Amedio Jungle—its proximity to shore making it the most tempting target of these ancient ruins. Much of the city has been picked over by thieves and looters, adventurers and scholars, whether they were trying to learn the reason for the city's death or merely seeking its many lost treasures.

Lavinia has promised the gnome explorer Urol Forol the chance to explore these infamous ruins, and has agreed to give him a day to do so. No other crew members set foot on shore at this time, for the ruins of Tamoachan are dangerous. Yet Lavinia is loath to let Urol go it alone—if the PCs don't jump at the chance to explore Tamoachan themselves, she asks them to accompany the gnome, if only to keep him from getting into too much trouble.

Urol's desire to explore Tamoachan arose only a week before the expedition left, when he came into the possession of a tattered map. He purchased the map from a one-legged sailor who claimed to have been given the map by a dying elf fished from the sea. This nameless elf claimed to have been part of an expedition into the ruins, and to have found a previously unexplored section of the city. Unfortunately, his party was attacked by a strange eight-legged lizard with glowing eyes that turned those who saw it to stone—only he escaped back to his ship. Alas, on the voyage back to Sasserine to recruit a new party to explore the ruin, his ship sank in a storm. The elf died soon after and the sailor, having no wish to explore a dangerous ruin, sold the map to Urol for a pretty penny.

Urol shows the map to the PCs if they ask; the section of ruins marked are only an hour's brisk walk into the jungle, the entrance hidden in the lee of a partially collapsed ziggurat. Urol tells the PCs he believes that the strange reptile the elf's party fought was a basilisk, a creature whose gaze petrifies its prey. If this causes the PCs to balk, Urol assures them that they'll be able to kill it easily, and even if one or two of them are turned to stone, he's come prepared with plenty of doses of *stone salve* to undo this fate. Urol doesn't tell the PCs he only has two doses of the stuff, though—certainly, these brave heroes can defeat a silly basilisk before more than two of them are petrified!

What Urol doesn't know is that the map's story, as told him by the one-legged sailor, is a complete fabrication—the only bit of truth to the tale was that this area of the ruins has indeed laid unexplored for many years. The one-legged sailor was in fact a disguised agent of Malcanthet, Demon Queen of Succubi. Ever watchful, she knows that her sometime ally and lover Demogorgon is up to something, yet also knows better than to directly confront the powerful demon lord about it. Consultation with strange oracles deep in the Abyss have led her to the PCs, who for reasons she still doesn't understand are fated to become embroiled in these matters soon enough. Malcanthet wants them on her side as a result—and if possible, without them knowing it.

Tamoachan Ruin Features

The one-hour trek through the jungle to Urol's ruins should go fairly easily, as most of the more dangerous denizens of Tamoachan like in underground chambers. The ruins that the PCs seek generally have ten-foot-high ceilings, and are constructed of blocks of unmortared stone covered with a flaking layer of stucco decorated with ancient images of men and animals.

1. Tchechiwhani's Nest (EL 5)

The jungle parts to reveal the ruins of a large chamber, once held within the root of the ziggurat above but now open to the elements. Images of pouncing and stalking cats grace what is left of the vine-strangled walls. Dozens of mouldering stuffed jungle-cats lie scattered around the edge of the exposed chamber, along with several strangely unweathered statues of men dressed in armor. Of the five passageways that once led further into the ziggurat's depths, only two remain uncollapsed.

Creature: The statues are adventurers, petrified by the gaze of the basilisk that lives here. Called tchechiwhani by the ancients, basilisks were often kept as pets by decadent rulers who fitted the dangerous creatures with helmets to block their petrifying gaze—helmets that could be removed at range with a hooked pole when said rulers wished to make statues of their vanquished and captured enemies.

This basilisk does not wear such a helmet. It spends much of its time sleeping in a nest of rubble in the northernmost collapsed passageway, but if it hears anyone in area 1, it quickly slithers out to investigate. It avoids pursuing creatures into the chambers, as it dislikes the confined spaces within (and is unsettled by the sound of area 2's denizen when it sis roused).

Basilisk: hp 45; *Monster Manual* 24.

Treasure: A DC 25 Search of the rubble-choked passageways uncovers a somewhat damaged marble statuette of a reclining humanoid figure with head turned and legs drawn up worth 78 gp and a small silver pyramid worth 3 gp.

2. Xochiquetzal's Chamber (EL 5)

A huge statue of a lumbering man outfitted in decayed skins and cracked skulls, his gaping and tusked mouth wide enough to swallow a halfling whole stands to the north. A battered but once intricately carved well sits to the south. The whole area is littered with skulls and shards of rusted metal.

The well in this room once contained a wondrous substance called liquid light, but a recent earthquake cracked the depths of the well shaft and opened it into a network of narrow fissures deep below the ground. A gibbering mouther named Xochiquetzal slithered up through these fissures, and has dwelt in the ruins for many years. It avoids the basilisk by slithering through these fissures to hunt in the surrounding ruins when hunger strikes.

Xochiquetzal, Gibbering Mouther: hp 42; *Monster Manual* 126.

Treasure: Xochiquetzal leaves the remains of its meals in its well, and is slowly filling the depths with bones. A half-hour search of the well unearths thousands of bones, along with some treasure: six turquoise gems worth 50 gp each, a +1 *dagger*, what appears to be an ivory wand but is in fact a folded fan of ivory slats worth 180 gp, a platinum bracelet worth 230 gp, and 124 gp.

Malcanthet's Plan

In years past, a lesser varrangoin outcast named Sutolore stole a powerful artifact from an enclave on the Abyss—the *tooth of Ahazu* (one of the *teeth of Dahlver-Nar*, an artifact detailed in the *Tome of Magic*). Sutolore sold the item in the Abyssal market of Broken Reach to an agent of Malcanthet in exchange for a sinecure in her domain. When Malcanthet identifies the PCs as possible agents in her efforts to undermine Demogorgon, she realizes that if they recover the *tooth of Ahazu*, their chances of success once they reach the Abyss will greatly improve, yet if they fail, she doesn't want Demogorgon or his agents to be able to trace any link back to her. She just needs to get the *tooth of Ahazu* into the PCs' hands in a subtle way.

Malcanthet sends Sutolore to the Material Plane to hide the *tooth of Ahazu* under the Fangs of Zotzilaha on the Isle of Dread in a hidden chamber unlikely to be visited by others for ages to come. Entry to this hidden chamber is controlled by a small golden idol of the bat god Camazotz; Sutolore steals the idol from the chamber then flies north to Tamoachan, placing the idol in the ruins detailed here among other treasures sacred to Camazotz. While Sutolore was placing the idol, another of Malcanthet's agents (this one magically disguised as a one-legged sailor) sold a map to the ruin to Urol, knowing that he would be involved with the PCs' coming expedition.

If all goes according to Malcanthet's plan, the PCs should stop off at Tamoachan, recover the bat idol from the ruins, travel on to the Isle of Dread, later find the cave where the *tooth of Ahazu* has been hidden, and then use the bat idol to recover the *tooth*. To the PCs (and hopefully anything observing them from afar), the discovery of the *tooth* should be a logical reward for their explorations. Which is how the Queen of Succubi prefers it.

3. Mictlan's Portal

A ten-foot-wide, fifty-foot-long landing overlooks a larger chamber to the north, accessible by a short flight of downward sloping stairs. The entrance to the larger room is framed by dozens of skeletons carved into the fifty-foot-wide arch, their bones intertwined with hundreds of carved snakes. Unnerving ripples of black smoke slither and dance among the carvings.

A DC 25 Knowledge (religion) check reveals that this archway marks the entrance to the ancient Olman land of the dead, marking the chambers beyond as an ancient crypt, or perhaps a place where the priests prepared the dead for their journey into the afterlife. The ripples of black smoke are the remnants of an ancient and mostly malfunctioning necromantic trap. Any character that steps throguh the arch must make a DC 15 Will save or be shaken for one round—this effect is harmless enough in the long run, but it prevents the jittery basilisk from pursuing foes into this chamber.

4. Ancient Tamoachan (EL 6)

The floor of this large chamber once contained a breathtaking carving of an ancient city, yet time has taken its toll on the map-like carving, reducing it to a tangled mess that, ironically, almost seems to reflect ruined Tamoachan above. The walls are decorated with brightly colored frescoes depicting a royal court in ceremonial garb and a king arrayed with his magnificent armies. Pathways wind through the ruins, affording a twisting route through the rubble. In the center of the room is a wide plaza, in the middle of which rests a low stone table.

This chamber once served the priests of Tamoachan as a place to prepare the dead for burial in area **10**. By preparing the dead in the center of this model of the city, they hoped to help ease the deceased into the afterlife by surrounding him with familiar vistas.

Trap: The ancients also protected this chamber with a devious trap. Three rounds after intruders enter this chamber, a *wall of fire* appears along the southern wall. The wall advances north at a speed of 15 feet, extinguishing when it hits the north wall. Three rounds later, if any living creature remains in the room, a new wall appears and sweeps north. The password to deactivate the trap, "Uetzcayotl," has unfortunately been lost to time. The fifteen-foot-wide collapse along the eastern wall represents the only safe zone in the room once the trap activates.

***Wall of Fire* Trap**: CR 6; magic device; location trigger; automatic reset; onset delay 3 rounds; spell effect (*wall of fire*, 9th-level wizard, 65-ft. length, 2d4 fire damage to creatures within 10 feet of north face, 1d4 to creatures within 20 feet of north face, 2d6+9 fire damage to any creature that passes through the wall); Search DC 30; Disable Device DC 30.

Development: Tlanextli, the will-o'-wisp that has claimed these ruins as its home, is likely to hear any loud noises from this chamber and comes to investigate, seeking to kill any lone characters it finds. If it finds more than one PC alive, it remains invisible and follows them, hoping they break through the iron wall in area **6**.

5. The New Tunnel

This tunnel appears to be a natural vent through the stone, rather than a constructed entrance.

The chambers between area **4** and **6** have collapsed; this tunnel opened up during the earthquake that struck the area a few years ago and damaged the well in area **2**, only recently restoring access to the chambers beyond.

6. Antechamber (EL 6)

The walls of this room are covered with eroded glyphs and hieroglyphic images depicting what appear to be batlike creatures feasting on humanoids. The eastern wall beyond a low archway in the room consists of a strangely out of place sheet of iron.

A DC 25 Spellcraft check identifies the metal wall as the result of a *wall of iron* spell. It completely seals off entrance to the room beyond, and is wedged into

groves that run around the alcove's perimeter. The wall can be battered down with enough force, something Urol urges the PCs to do since it's obvious the ruins continue on the other side of the wall.

Iron Wall: 2 in. thick; Hardness 10; hp 60 hp per 5-ft. section; Break DC 29.

Creature: A will-o'-wisp named Tlanextli dwells in this chamber, cut off from the rest of its lair by the *wall of iron* that Sutolore triggered when the two fought several weeks ago. Tlanextli views the chambers beyond as its empire, and the thought of another creature dwelling therein when it can't reach these chambers has all but driven the aberration mad with frustration. It views the arrival of the PCs with an optimistic curiosity, and holds back its natural instinct to feed from their emotions or to attack in favor of remaining invisible, following quietly, and hoping they find a way through to the room beyond.

Tlanextli, Will-o'-Wisp: hp 40; *Monster Manual* 255.

7. Tloquatcha's Crypt (EL 5)

This chamber bears a strange resemblance to the previous one, in that the floor consists of a stone scale model of an ancient city. Yet whereas the previous model was terribly damaged, this chamber seems relatively well preserved. The layout and style of the city is quite different, with four wide canals converging upon a large lake in the center, from which rises a great stone pyramid. Mighty temples rise from the low angular buildings, while the stone walls depict lifelife depictions of leering bats, lizards, and snakes.

When the varrangoin Sutolore intruded upon this chamber some time ago, he clashed with Tlanextli the will-o'-wisp in this chamber. After wounding Tlanextli and forcing it to flee, Sutolore pressed deeper in here to place the bat idol he stole from the Isle of Dread. Unfortunately, he triggered a trap in area **8** that caused a *wall of iron* to seal him into these chambers.

The city depicted here shows a section of ancient Tamoachan that served as a necropolis for the city's dead. A DC 30 Knowledge (history) check reveals as much.

Trap: The central pyramid is actually a sarcophagus. A DC 20 Search check reveals that the top level of the pyramid can be pushed aside, revealing a hollow within occupied by a mummified Olman priest, bound in a fetal position by lengths of brittle leather cords. The priest is quite dead, but the golden ceremonial necklace around its neck looks valuable. Unfortunately, the air in the sarcophagus is thick with ancient disease. When opened, a cloud of dust blooms from within, filling a 20-foot-radius spread. All creatures in this area must make a DC 16 Fortitude save or contract mummy rot (*Monster Manual* 190).

Mummy Rot Trap: CR 5; mechanical device; touch tigger; no reset; multiple targets (all creatures in a 20-foot spread);

mummy rot (DC 16 Fortitude resists); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 26.

Treasure: A ceremonial golden necklace carved to resemble a string of bat and lizard heads still hangs from the dead priest's neck. This is in fact a *strand of prayer beads* with a *bead of blessing* and a *bead of healing*.

Development: The pristine condition of this chamber is fascinating to Urol, and he demands to be left here for as long as possible so he can make sketches of the room's carvings and sculptures. When finally forced to leave, the little gnome is uncharacteristically morose. Once reminded of the mysteries that await him on the Isle of Dread, though, he cheers right back up.

8. The Great Calendar Stone

A huge circular disk of stone dominates the floor of this chamber, its face carved with dozens of concentric rings of hieroglyphs and shapes. A filthy nest of bones and rubble sits atop it.

This disc is an ancient Olman calendar stone, used once to track the movement of celestial bodies.

Creature: The outcast varrangoin Sutolore was once a member of a large tribe that roosted in the ruined fortress of Overlook on the seventy-third layer of the Abyss, known as the Wells of Darkness. After crossing the tribe's ruling coven, Sutelore fled with a relic known as the *tooth of Ahazu*. Sutolore sold the relic in the town of Broken Reach on the first layer of the Abyss to a succubus in Malcanthet's service. Unfortunately for Sutolore, Malcanthet's plots left him little time to explore the hedonistic paradise of her Abyssal realm of Shendilavri before he was sent to the Material Plane on an important mission for the Queen of Succubi.

After reaching the ruins, Sutolore found them to be occupied by a territorial will-o'-wisp. A battle ensued, and although it resulted in a draw, Sutolore found himself trapped in the ruins by a *wall of iron*—a magical trap designed by the ancient Olmans to imprison would-be graverobers in the tomb.

Since being captured, Sutolore has survived on the rancid water at the bottom of the shaft in area **10** and has eaten nearly all of the foul-tasting hooded tarantulas that dwelt along the walls of that shaft. Exceptionally hungry and frustated at his predicament, the varrangoin is in ripe condition to attack anything that crosses his path.

SUTOLORE **CR 6**

Male lesser varrangoin
CE Medium magical beast (extraplanar)
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +2, Spot +2
Languages Abyssal, Varrangoin

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16
hp 32 (5 HD) **DR** 10/cold iron
Resists acid 10, cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 12
Fort +5, **Ref** +7, **Will** +1
Weakness light blindness

Spd 20 ft. fly 40 ft. (average)
Melee bite +7 (1d6+2) and
2 claws +5 (1d4+1) and
tail sting +5 (1d4+1 plus poison)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +7
Atk Options Flyby Attack, poison (DC 13, 1d6 Dex/1d6 Dex)
Special Actions breath weapon (30 ft. cone of fire; 3d6; Ref DC 13 half; at will)

Abilities Str 14, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 11, Cha 8
SQ death throes
Feats Alertness, Flyby Attack, Multiattack
Skills Hide +11, Listen +2, Move Silently +11, Spot +2

Death Throes (Ex) When killed, Sutolore explodes in a 20-foot radius burst of energy. This explosion deals 3d6 fire damage (Ref DC 13 half).
Light Blindness (Ex) Exposure to bright light (such as sunlight or a *daylight* spell) blinds Sutolore for 1 round. After that, he takes a –1 penalty on attacks, saves, and skill checks while operating in bright light.

Tactics: As soon as Sutolore hears anything moving about in area **7**, he leaves his shabby nest on the calendar stone to investigate. Upon finding the PCs, he shrieks and attacks with his breath weapon while flying circles in the large room. He resorts to melee combat only if his foes seem resistant to fire or if he's confronted in a smaller area. If reduced to less than 10 hit points, Sutolore abandons the fight and attempts to escape.

If the PCs haven't slain Tlanextli when Sutolore attacks, the will-o'-wisp joins the fight, perhaps allying itself with the PCs against their foe. Such an allegiance lasts only as long as Sutolore remains in Tlanextli's lair—as soon as he's slain or driven off, Tlanextli turns its wrath on the PCs.

9. Guardians of the Well of Death

Twin statues of men dressed in strange, ancient armor and wearing towering headdresses made of coiled snakes and bat wings stand at either side of an arched doorway here. Beyond the archway beckons a circular room, its walls adorned with dozens of niches in which rest the desiccated bodies of long-dead men and women.

These statues once triggered the *wall of iron* trap built to wall in grave-robbers; Sutolore ironically triggered it when he added the golden bat statuette to one of the crypts in area **10**. The trap was intended to trigger only once, and no longer poses a threat.

10. The Well of Death

A yawning shaft descends into gloom here. The walls of the shaft are fitted with hundreds of niches, upon which lie the dusty bones of heroes, priests, kings, queens, and warriors of a bygone age. Resting upon the topmost niche, cradled in the arms of a skeleton, is a glittering golden statuette of a bat.

The shaft here is 100 feet deep, although the bottom 20 feet consists of stagnant water that has drained in here from above. None of the bodies here are buried with anything of value, with one exception.

Treasure: The golden bat idol clutched by the topmost body is a fantastic work of art, with rubies for eyes and tiny slivers of pearl for fangs and claws. A DC 25 Knowledge (religion) check identifies it as a representation

of Camazotz, an ancient god of bats and the night. Its presence here is not unusual, since much of the iconigraphy on the walls indicates that the builders of this crypt worshiped him, but if this Knowledge (religion) check exceeds the DC by 10, the character notices that the craftsmanship of the idol is leaner, more angular than that of the images of Camazotz from the surrounding walls—almost as if whoever created the idol were from a different region entirely. The idol radiates faint transmutation magic, and an *identify* or similar spell reveals that the idol is in fact some sort of key. In any event, the idol itself is worth 2,500 gp, so it's unlikely the PCs will leave it behind. If they do, Malcanthet may be forced to intervene, sending another agent to retrieve the idol and surreptitiously return it to the possessions of one of the PCs.

In any event, once the PCs have explored the ruins and convinced Urol it's time to go, continue with Part Two above.

PART FIVE: SARGASSO

Sailors call it Journey's End, and speak of it in hushed tones—a floating graveyard that scours the ocean, constantly seeking new ships to add to its collection. This is the sargasso of the Mother of All, and it represents the greatest danger the PCs are destined to face on their voyage to the Isle of Dread.

The *Sea Wyvern* encounters the strange sargasso bed after the first storm separates her from the *Blue Nixie*. None on board notice the sargasso's advent; it comes upon the ship at night, under the cover of an overcast sky. The next morning, the crew wakens to an unsettling sight.

As the gray dawn breaks, burning fitfully through the morning fog to light the sea, something seems strange about the waters below. They seem almost solid, as if the sea had formed some strange sort of skin. The air seems dead as well, and the sails hang limp, heavy with moisture from the receding fog.

Finally, the mist begins to clear, and what is unveiled is not the gently rolling vista of the sea but a wet green field of weed. The swath of dirty green stretches flatly in all directions. To the stern, it extends for perhaps a half mile, beyond which lie the open waters of the mocking sea. In all other directions, the weed extends to the horizon. Trapped within its vice are dozens of other long-dead ships, their hulls protruding from the sargasso at odd angles, masts askew, sails hanging in tatters. One such ship lies mired only six hundred feet to the port, and it seems to be in better shape than the others. Perhaps most unnerving, however, is neither the sight nor smell of so much sun-baked seaweed. It is the unnatural silence, for the thick choking green has robbed the *Sea Wyvern* even of the strangely comforting sound of water lapping against her hull. It is not a healthy silence. It is the silence of a graveyard.

The Sargasso

Characters may make a Knowledge (nature), Profession (sailor), or bardic knowledge check to determine what they may have heard about their most recent plight.

DC 15: The swath of seaweed is a sargasso, a treacherous patch of vegetation often driven by storms only to collect in regions of the ocean that even the wind and currents seem to fear. A patch a mile across would be unusual, yet this swath stretches to the horizon.

DC 20: Sailors call it Journey's End, and speak of it in hushed tones—rumors of a living island that appears from the mists after storms. This living land is said to have a black soul that fuels the hunger of children rumored to live within its green embrace.

vel, a ship hauntingly similar to the *Sea Wyvern*, has been torn apart by the vegetation's rampant growth. A plate near the stern gives the vessel's name—*Rage*.

This caravel lies two hundred yards away from the *Sea Wyvern*, her hull crushed and her decks listing perilously to port. As the PCs approach the *Rage*, be sure to emphasize the quality of the sargasso—the dampness, the disorientation of walking on unsure ground, and the strange currents in the puddles that swirl around the heroes' feet, almost as if the fronds of the weed itself were stirring.

The timbers of the *Rage's* deck are rotting, and squelch nastily underfoot as the PCs board the wreck. Ship beams have been ruptured by the vines, which cling to every surface. As the PCs explore the *Rage*, they note signs of combat—a swath of dried blood, a broken rapier's blade lodged in a mast, or signs of frantic fortification.

DC 25: Journey's End is one of the sea's more terrible blights, and is said to be able to crush ships in its grip. Its children are awful creatures formed of the weed itself, and are said to rise by night to slake their hunger upon any their green mother has caught in her grasp.

General Features

This is one case where the half-whispered rumors are true—the *Sea Wyvern* has fallen prey to a sinister and dangerous menace known as the Mother of All, a hateful aquatic plant. The Mother of All has grown enormous over the decades, and measures well over ten miles in diameter now. Fortunately for the PCs, her fronds are mostly inert except at her core, where she remains horribly, hungrily alive.

In most places the sargasso surface consists of a heavy mat of seaweed. The mat is ten feet thick, and dense enough to walk on (although characters must spend two squares of movement to enter a square of heavy sargasso mat, and the DC of Tumble checks increases by 5).

Near the sargasso's heart, the green fronds rise up into large forests of stinking, rotting kelp, forming mounds of the stuff from which brown and green arms almost like branches or even trees protrude.

The Mother of All dwells at the sargasso's center, in the hull of her first victim, a ship called the *Thunderer*. She can vaguely sense the presence of life moving about on her fronds, and the first night after the PCs become mired in the weed, she sends the first of her children to greet them.

In any event, the *Sea Wyvern* is doomed to rot in this green embrace. Attempts to burn or cut away the weed might allow the ship to make a few dozen feet of headway each day, but the stuff grows back with unnatural speed. Eventually, the PCs should be driven to seek out clues to their predicament in nearby wrecks, such as the wreck of the *Rage*, which lies only a few hundred feet away.

The Wreck of the Rage

The wreck is strangled with weeds and vines, almost as if immense green claws hold the ship in their grasp. In many places the cara-

1. Upper Deck

The upper deck is wreathed in slippery seaweed and swaths of what appear to be thick green mucus. Although almost everything has been smashed, the remains of three dozen burnt torches and an upturned cauldron that seems to have recently been filled with oil are still visible. Anyone who scrapes away the mucus or vines and makes a DC 15 Search check discovers that in many spots, the wood appears to have been partially burnt.

2. Crew Room

The doors from the deck above have been barred with timbers, but to no avail, as they lay smashed herein along with a broken ballista. Although once the ship had lower decks, they have been completely filled with weed and hold nothing of interest to the PCs.

3. Captain's Cabin (EL 6)

Beyond the crew room lies the captain's cabin. A large hole is in the floor, through which the green of the sargasso can be seen. PCs that enter this room can make DC 15 Spot checks to notice that a tattered journal lies on the edge of a table across the room. Unfortunately, the ship's deck has sunk, and the journal now lies precariously perched at the table's edge.

As soon as anyone enters the room on foot, the floorboards twist and buckle, sending the journal into the sargasso 5 feet below. The journal's pages can last for up to three rounds in the soggy water of the pit before the words contained within become illegible. It's a simple matter to leap into the hole to retrieve the book, but unfortunately, the pit is far from uninhabited.

Creature: Three aquatic assassin vines, living in symbiosis with the strands of the sargasso, grow in the weed nearby. Any creature that comes within reach (such as anyone leaping into the hole to nab a fallen journal) is immediately attacked.

These assassin vines are identical to the ones in the *Monster Manual*, save that they have a swim speed of 5 feet and can survive in air or water with ease.

Assassin Vines (3): hp 30 each; *Monster Manual* 20.

Treasure: The journal chronicles the tale of a monk named Anhelm and his journey along the southern coast of the Amedio to visit the natives of the Isles of Axuxal. The document tells of a fierce storm that drove the *Rage* far out to sea, but it is the entries on the last few pages that are of the greatest interest to the PCs—see Handout 1.

Handout 1

This foul green land is stained with blight. We tried to cut away the weed, but to no avail, and soon had to abandon the tools we had used, their edges dulled to misery.

At noon I ordered Carus and Twaid out onto the weed to explore. How large can such a place be? The crew grow restless.

It is dusk. Efforts to destroy the weed have failed. I have explored what I could, but this is all mists and weed. When will Carus and Twaid return? Despite the calm, the night is not still, and I feel eyes watching me.

The night brought noises but no attack, but I fear for my brothers, I heard cries in the night—was it them? I feel something is alive here, but what can it be? Captain Grough claimed the land had a black heart—maybe Carus and Twaid will have some useful information when they return.

Afternoon. I have decided to find my brothers, and have taken Ranis and Pale with me. They are good brothers, and will aid me as best they can. We shall find the land's black heart.

We headed east, making good headway as only brothers can. By night we had covered many miles but saw nothing but more of the green.

It is night, and I can hear life. Something moves at the edge of sight. Why do they not show themselves? I can hear them whisper one word, over and over, "Outsiders..."

It is afternoon. We have come to a terrible place, a forest of weed grown in mockery of real life, a mire of skeletal ships. How many souls have been lost here? Our supplies grow wan, we must return by the morn to the Rage.

It is dawn, and we have returned to the Rage too late. The crew are gone and the green holds her ever fast. Where have they gone?

I can hear them in the day now. They are outside. They are watching. They want me to join them, but I shall not.

Ranis and Pale are dead. They came through the mist, yet they were not the same. I knew them by the tatters of clothes draped over the green that took their flesh. What wore their bodies has been vanquished, but I know now that these were but the children of what dwells at this land's heart. I must seek the mother at this heart, for to destroy the mother is to destroy the brood. If only I had...

The First Night (EL 7 or 8)

Even if the PCs head out into the sargasso at once, they are unlikely to discover the wreck of the *Thunderer* before night falls. As the sun sets, allow the PCs to make DC 15 Spot checks. With a success, they notice shapes stirring in the distant green, and as the last light of day fades and the mist rises once again, they may just see the shape of horror rising from the weeds.

With night comes the fog (reducing visibility to 30 feet and providing concealment [20% miss chance] to all creatures within) and the children of the sargasso—vine horrors. These plant monsters are vaguely humanoid, fatted on the bodies of the sargasso's victims and hungry to add more to the hive. The vaguely humanoid plant monsters share a rudimentary hive mind—not enough to communicate with each other, but enough for them to receive impulses from the Mother of All that dwells at this land's core. She senses new life on the *Sea Wyvern* (or at the PCs' camp, if night catches them elsewhere on the sargasso), and sends the vine horrors to collect.

The vine horrors are relentless foes, and the sargasso hides hundreds, if not thousands, of the creatures. During the first night, you should run as many vine horror attacks as you think the PCs can bear; if the fights begin to feel repetitive, feel free to let dawn come and send the monsters back to their

watery homes below the sargasso surface. It's best to focus on the battles that involve the PCs. Feel free to have some of the unnamed colonists go missing, but the named NPCs shouldn't be idly killed off.

Vine horrors generally attack in groups of 3–4. The goal isn't to overwhelm the PCs, simply to impress upon them the relentless nature of their foes. As they attack, they whisper and call to the PCs, speaking only one word over and over: "Outsiders...".

VINE HORROR **CR 4**

NE Medium plant (aquatic)

Init +3; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +3, Spot +3

Languages Common

AC 19, touch 13, flat-footed 16

hp 42 (5 HD)

Immune plant traits

Fort +8, **Ref** +1, **Will** +2

Spd 30 ft., swim 20 ft.

Melee 2 slams +7 (1d6+4)

Base Atk +3; **Grp** +7

Atk Options Blind Fight

Special Actions *animate vines*

Abilities Str 18, Dex 10, Con 19, Int 9, Wis 13, Cha 10

SQ malleability

Feats Alertness, Blind Fight

Skills Hide +0 (+15 in swamps), Listen +3, Spot +2, Swim +16

***Animate Vines* (Sp)** A vine horror can use this ability at will to animate any single strand of sargasso within 90 feet. An animated vine fights as an assassin vine (*Monster Manual* 20). If the vine horror is incapacitated or moves out of range, the vine returns to normal.

Malleability (Ex) Because of its unusual body structure, a vine horror can compress its body enough to squeeze through a 1-inch-wide crack. Cracks and similar openings that are 1 inch or more in width do not slow the vine horror at all.

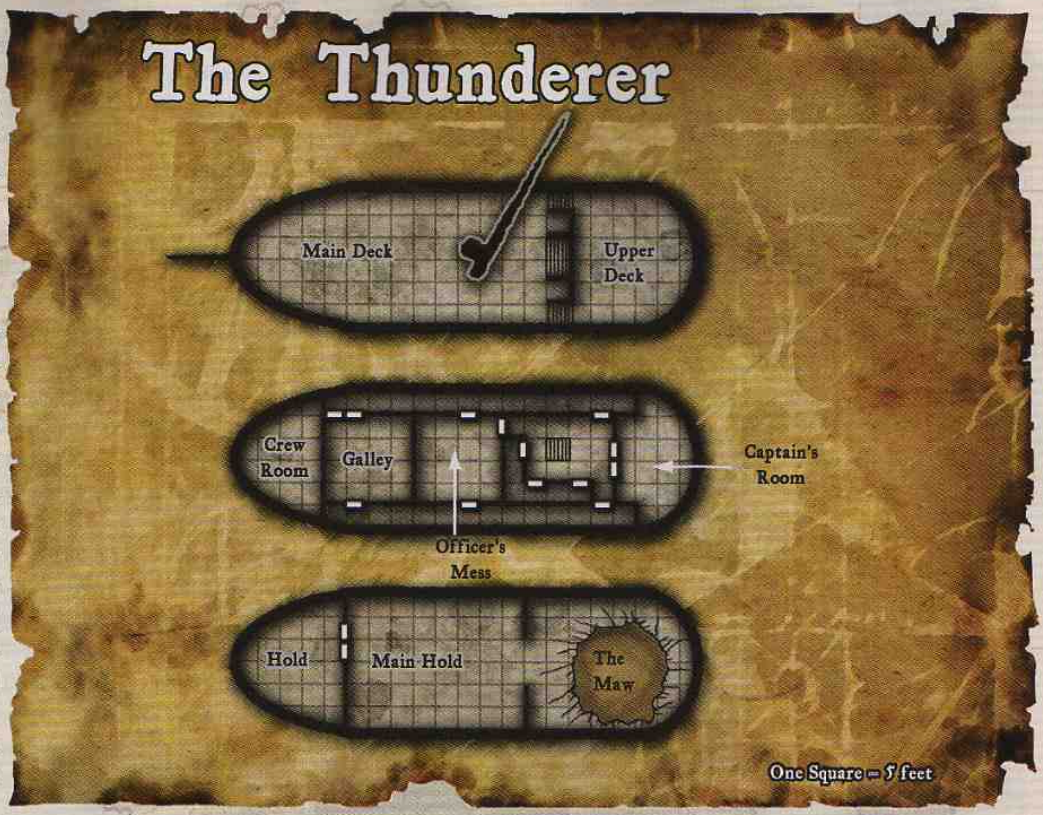
The Second, Third, and Subsequent Nights

The war of attrition builds. Unless the PCs intervene or help with ideas of defenses on board, colonists and crew go missing as the days pass. Before long, things should grow desperate, and if the PCs don't seek out the source of the horror on their own, perhaps Urol, Amella, Skald, or even Avner suggests they do their thing and play the part of heroes. Until the PCs destroy the Mother of All, they have little to look forward to but night after night of relentless assaults by her children.

Other Shipwrecks

The *Rage* and the *Sea Wyvern* are far from the only wrecks mired in the weed. Other wrecks litter the sargasso, yet these are little more than sad empty shells covered in the foul mucus and vines of the land. If you wish, some of these wrecks could hide vine horrors or aquatic assassin vines.

Some of the ships are over fifty years old, as anyone with a DC 15 Knowledge (history) or Profession (sailor) check can tell. Valuable objects may be found within them at your discretion.



The Wreck of the Thunderer

Eventually, through luck or careful planning, the PCs should come upon the forest of kelp at the sargasso's heart. The fact that only here does the landscape change should pique their interest, and as they approach more closely, they discover something lodged at the heart of this land—the wreck of a caravel called the *Thunderer*.

This place is the home of the Mother. Her fronds extend outward for miles, comprising the sargasso itself, yet here in the hold of this ship she is horribly, malignantly alive. As the PCs approach the ship, they hear a strange whispering voice in their minds—not words so much as a mental beacon. Anyone who looks back across the sargasso sees the entire place coming alive. The Mother has sensed their approach, and if the PCs cannot destroy her soon, her thousand young converge at the core to tear the PCs apart.

The time the PCs have to explore the *Thunderer* is dynamic; the slow march of the vine horrors converging upon them is meant primarily to instill a sense of dread, and is not a promise of a mass battle (unless the PCs decide to retreat from the *Thunderer* to rest, perhaps).

Exploring the Wreck (EL 7)

Unlike the other wrecks, the original skeletons of the crew remain aboard, soggy bones mingled with broken chests, weapons, and rigging. The wreck itself is nearly sunken into the weed. It's a mere five-foot climb (DC 10 Climb check) to clamber onto the main deck. The lower decks are accessable from above, but are located below the level of the weed surface. Along the walls, fronds and feelers of seaweed protrude and twitch.

Within the *Thunderer* wait six more vine horrors, and in order to reach the Mother of All the PCs need to confront and defeat them. Feel free to have the PCs encounter them in two groups of three, and try to time them organically at stressful points during the exploration. In all rooms below decks, fronds of weed protruding from between boards give the vine horrors plenty of targets to animate to aid in their attacks on the PCs.

Treasure: The *Thunderer's* hold still contains much of her valuable cargo, and a quick search of the rotten chests kept herein uncovers quite a lot of booty, including 1,200 gp, 462 pp, four fine scrimshaw carvings (each depicting one of the seasons and worth 250 gp if cleaned) a quartet of golden goblets worth 100 gp each, a silver church candelabrum worth 350 gp, an enormous steel barnacle-covered shield depicting sharks devouring men (a *+1 animated tower shield*), and a watertight bone scroll tube containing an arcane scroll of *hold monster*, *waves of fatigue*, and *permanency*.

The Birthing Maw (EL 8)

When characters finally reach the lowest level of the ship, in the aft hold labeled "The Maw," they come to the lair of the Mother of All:

> A huge section of the hull has rotted away here, leaving a stinking pit with walls of writhing green and brown vegetation. These walls writhe with horrible half-formed life, semi-human shapes twisting and spasming from thick tumescent stalks like anthropomorphic fruits ready for harvest. The pit drops away into a noisome, unseen depth, certainly far deeper than sea level, into an unknown hell below.

The Maw itself is 100 feet deep and lined with young vine horrors—walls of screaming seedlings and writhing adolecents waiting to mature, a process that takes several weeks. At the shaft's deepest point is a swill of water and decay, and it is here that the Mother of All dwells.

The shaft is 25 feet in diameter, and the air within is stifling hot and foul. Any creature that enters the pit must make a DC 14 Fortitude save or be nauseated for 1d6 rounds. The unformed and growing

Scaling the Adventure

"The Sea Wyvern's Wake" is designed for a group of four 5th-level characters, but with a little work it can be adapted for use by 3rd–4th level characters. Simply adjust any NPC character levels by 1 for every level by which your party's average deviates from 5.

Reduce the flotsam ooze to a Large creature with 6 Hit Dice. *Purity's Prow* should have a further 10 to 20 points of damage to her hull and rigging. Replace the seven-headed hydra in aea E with a five- or six-headed hydra. Mashers encountered should be much more skittish, and retreat back into hiding in their reef as soon as they take a total of 20 points of damage.

In Tamoachan, replace the basilisk with a grick or a carrion crawler. Replace the gibbering mouther with a gray ooze. The *wall of fire* trap in area 4 should not move. Remove Tlanextli from the adventure, and make Sutolore a 6 Hit Die half-red dragon dire bat. Remove one or two of the assassin vines from the wreck of the *Rage*, and have the PCs encounter vine horrors in groups of one or two at most. The Mother of All should be replaced by a half-fiend vine horror.

vine horrors in the walls twitch and writhe to the touch, but are incapable of attacking. It's possible to clamber down the shaft with a DC 20 Climb check.

Creature: The Mother of All dwells at the bottom of this shaft, yet she is capable of sinking into the surrounding sargasso and reappearing at any point in the mire by using *transport via plants*. If the PCs attempt to attack her from above, she simply appears at the top of the shaft, extruding forth from the rim of the Maw to strike at her enemies.

Mother of All: hp 105; see Appendix.

Development: When reduced to zero hit points, the Mother collapses in on herself and dies—a writhing mass of rotting vegetation that howls and shrieks until finally it lies still. A moment later, the sargasso itself wakens, as the countless of vine horrors that still live within feel the death of their Mother. Without her to hold their forms, they rapidly fall apart into sludge. A few rounds after that, the sargasso shudders and shakes as it begins to unravel from the center. The first to collapse is the maw itself, which collapses over a period of two minutes, filling with seawater at a rate of 5 feet per round. The land quickly follows, and within an hour the whole place has lost its cohesion.

With the exception of the *Sea Wyvern*, the remaining ships mired in the sargasso sink as the mass drifts apart. The dissolution churns the waters of the sea somewhat, and it's a DC 15 Swim check to stay afloat. Luckily, the *Thunderer* collapses into ruin as the sargasso melts away, leaving in its wake plenty of driftwood for the PCs to cling to (negating the need for Swim checks to keep from sinking). In 1d4 hours, the *Sea Wyvern*, captained by Amella in the PCs' absence, appears on the horizon to reclaim her floundering owners. By the time the PCs are safely back on board, all trace of Journey's End has gone.

The expedition is now free to continue on to the last leg of their journey, as detailed in Part Three above.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

After escaping the perils of Masher Reef in encounter L, the crippled *Sea Wyvern* limps along the waves. It should be obvious to the PCs their vessel will not reach Farshore—that they will be lucky to reach any shore. The closest stretch of land beckons only 25 miles away, where a narrow strip of beach along a thick wall of jungle might afford somewhere safe to land.

The storm continues through the night. Although the winds abate enough that there's no need for Profession (sailor) checks to avoid rolls or washes, it's strong enough that the tattered ship seems in danger of sinking at any second. Caught by the storm and the tide, the badly listing *Sea Wyvern* is driven toward the northern shore of the Isle of Dread. The primeval vista looms larger before the PCs through the driving rain, periodically lit by flashes of lightning. Suddenly, the ship lurches again, throwing everyone to the deck. The *Sea Wyvern* tilts crazily to the side, lurches one last time, and rolls. The cold dark sea rushes up to meet the PCs, and in a cacophonous roar of wave and ruin, all goes dark...

APPENDIX: NEW MONSTERS

Masher

This wormlike fish measures nearly thirty feet from tip to tail. Its face is a terrible circular maw of grinding teeth, with two beady eyes peering out from the crown of its head. Large spines rise from its sinuous back, shuddering and rattling with menace.

MASHER **CR 6**

Always N Huge animal (aquatic)

Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +0, Spot +0

AC 19, touch 9, flat-footed 18 (–2 size, +1 Dex, +10 natural)

hp 68 (8 HD)

Fort +10, **Ref** +9, **Will** +2

Spd 20 ft., swim 40 ft.

Melee bite +12 (3d6+12)

Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +22

Atk Options poison spines

Abilities Str 27, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 1, Wis 10, Cha 8

Feats Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes

Skills Hide +4 (+12 in coral reefs)

Environment warm oceans (coral reefs)

Organization solitary, pair, or school (3–8)

Treasure none

Advancement 9–16 HD (Huge), 17–32 HD (Gargantuan)

Poison Spines (Ex) When angered, a masher extends several of poisonous spines from its back. The fish is adept at reflexively aiming these spines at any creature it can sense. It can use its spines to make attacks of opportunity on any creature that attacks it with any melee weapon, provided the masher threatens the attacking foe. Attacks made with these spines are at +12, with a hit inflicting 1d6+8 points of damage. A creature struck by a masher's spine must make a DC 18 Fortitude save to resist taking 1d6 points of Constitution damage. One minute later, the creature must save again to resist taking a further 2d6 points of Constitution damage.

Skills A masher's coloration grants it a +8 racial bonus on Hide checks made while within five feet of a coral reef.

These wormlike fish move slowly along coral reefs, crushing and eating coral

growth by mashing it with their powerful jaws. They are exceptionally territorial, and if threatened are prone to attacking in "self-defense" with a ferocity generally associated only with the most cantankerous of predators.

Masher steaks are particularly delicious, and are considered an exotic delicacy in many ports. Preparation of masher for consumption is a delicate process, as their poison glands run throughout their body. With a DC 22 Profession (cook) check, the food is safe to eat. Consumption of an improperly prepared masher steak results in poisoning as if the feaster had been stuck by one of the fish's spines.

Mother of All

This dislocated sack of foul smelling vegetation is wreathed in screaming humanoid forms that struggle to free themselves from the foul flesh. A vast distended belly bathed in foul green mucus hangs from the vaguely humanoid form. Infantile cries echo from the hideous passengers that slowly pull themselves from their mother. Twenty feet tall, this grotesque hybrid of woman and plant is a nightmare of mucoid arms and clustered eyes. It is a deviant thing of rot, a pyramidical bulk that rises to a head of eyes and barbed, thorny teeth.

MOTHER OF ALL **CR 8**

Always N (any) Huge plant (aquatic)

Init –2; **Senses** all-around vision, low-light vision.; Listen +13, Spot +17

Aura babbling young

Languages Aquan, Common; limited telepathy

AC 16, touch 6, flat-footed 16 (–2 Dex, –2 size, +10 natural)

hp 105 (10 HD); DR 5/cold iron

Resist cold 10

Immune electricity, plant traits

Fort +15, **Ref** +1, **Will** +5

Spd 30 ft., swim 30 ft.; transport via sargasso

Melee bite +15 (2d6+10) and 2 claws +13 (1d6+5)

Space 15 ft. **Reach** 15 ft.

Base Atk +7; Grp +25

Attack Options carried progeny

Abilities Str 30, Dex 7, Con 22, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 10

SQ amphibious, sargasso, spawn

Feats Great Fortitude, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Iron Will, Multiattack

Skills Listen +13, Spot +17, Swim +18

Environment ocean

Organization solitary

Treasure standard

Advancement 11–18 HD (Huge), 19–30 HD (Gargantuan)

All-Around Vision (Ex) The Mother of All can see in all directions at once, thanks to the immature vine horrors linked to her. It gets a +4 racial bonus on Spot checks, and cannot be flanked.

Carried Progeny (Ex) The immature vine horrors that cover the Mother of All constantly lash out at any creature that gets too close. Any creature adjacent to the Mother of All at the start of the Mother's turn is subject to a slam attack from the carried progeny (+13 melee, 1d6+5 damage).

Babbling Yong (Su) A Mother of All is constantly in the process of spawning dozens of vine horrors. The immature vine horrors produce a cacophony of wailing that interferes with spellcasting. Any creature within 60 feet of a Mother of All that attempts to cast a spell must first succeed on a DC 15 (+1/spell level) Concentration check or lose the spell.

Limited Telepathy (Su) The Mother of All can communicate telepathically with any vine horror within a 10 mile radius.

Affiliation awards

If your PCs belong to any of the affiliations detailed in Dragon #348's "Savage Tidings," goals exist in "The Sea Wyvern's Wake" that can increase their affiliation score. Each of the following criterions grants an affiliation score modifier of +1.

Church of the Whirling Fury: Kill Sutolore and report his death to the Church.

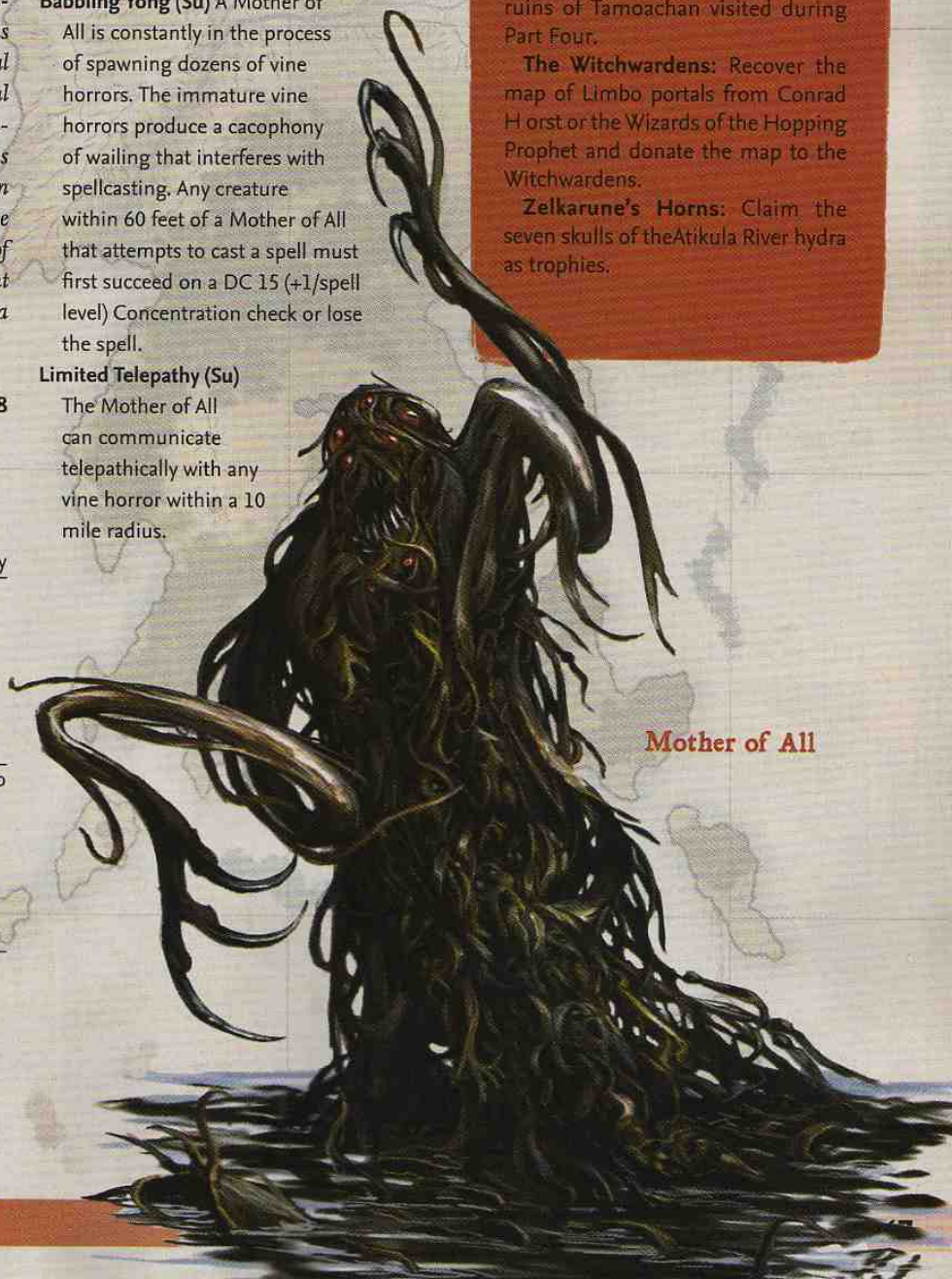
The Dawn Council: Report the destruction of Fort Greenrock, one of the few friendly ports of call along the Amedio Coast, to the Dawn Council.

The Scarlet Brotherhood: Negotiate a non-violent resolution to the Brotherhood Blockade.

The Seekers: Provide a map and documents detailing the unexplored ruins of Tamoachan visited during Part Four.

The Witchwardens: Recover the map of Limbo portals from Conrad H orst or the Wizards of the Hopping Prophet and donate the map to the Witchwardens.

Zelkarune's Horns: Claim the seven skulls of theAtikula River hydra as trophies.



Mother of All

Sargasso (Ex) A Mother of All creates a vast stretch of seaweed in the ocean that constantly grows at the rate of 1 square mile a year. The Mother of All cannot leave its sargasso field, although if the seaweed is somehow destroyed, it can create a new one.

Spawn (Ex) A Mother of All produces a new vine horror every three days. It automatically commands any vine horrors within a 10-mile radius. As a free action, it can issue a cry of distress that causes all the vine horrors on the sargasso to return to her at once to defend her.

Transport via Sargasso (Su) Once every minute, a Mother of All can *transport via plants* as a free action. It may only transport via the sargasso she creates, and may appear anywhere within the sargasso.

Pickled Mephit

First appearing in the alchemical opium dens of the Styes, a *pickled mephit* appears as a sizable glass jar of briny liquid, in which floats a vaguely humanoid shape. If the wax-sealed lid is lifted (a move aciton) or the fragile jar is dropped upon an unyielding surface to shatter (a free action), the mephit stored within the jar wakens from its magically-induced preservation to angrily attack the closest target. A *pickled mephit* jar can be thrown as a grenade-like weapon—the mephit generally attacks whoever it strikes. The user of the item has no control over the released mephit, and is advised to be well away from the jar when it is opened.

Moderate conjuration; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster IV*; Price 1,400 gp.

Numerous variations of the Mother of All exist, from Sargasso Mothers (which create lands of living seaweed) to Jungle Mothers (great bloated trees), to Moor Mothers (living twisted moorlands). All have one thing in common—they spawn vine horrors of a similar appearance to the land they breed. The Mother quickly grows to subsume the land itself with her roots and branches, a growing mass of vegetation that has a unique and insidious quality of overwhelming all other forms of land in its path. This verdant cancer spreads slowly, at a leisurely rate of about a mile a year. A Mother of All can spawn a hundred vine horrors a year with ease. Her colony forms a crude hive mind and the mother can communicate with them at great distances.

The effects of the advancing vegetation depend upon the terrain, but generally anything inanimate in its path is slowly overwhelmed and absorbed into the whole.

Richard writes, "And there I was, thinking the second time would be easier... Where's that ladder? Which tree to hide in now—ah! The big horrible one Vaughan and Logue are climbing...

"Big thanks to Eric Boyd and that scoundrel Steve Greer for the long discussion on breathing life into a classic D&D cover. May I humbly suggest that before you run the sargasso you treat yourself to a viewing of one of my favorite films, Aliens, *and learn from the classic "against the odds" monster movie."*

THE PORTENT

by Peter Bergting

IT'S THE "NEW EXTRA REMASTERED DOOM" EDITION OF LORD OF THE RINGS!
YOU ALREADY HAVE THE ORIGINAL, THE EXTENDED, AND THE SUPER EXTENDED DIRECTOR'S CUT VERSIONS.
WHAT COULD POSSIBLY BE NEW IN THIS ONE THAT YOU DON'T ALREADY HAVE?
A TINY, TALKING GIMLI!
SALTED PORK!
OH GOD...

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Swords of Dragonslake

BY NICOLAS LOGUE,
BY JEFF LAUBENSTIEN,
BY ROB LAZZARETTI,

ANY SETTING, MID LEVEL (6TH–12TH), URBAN,

The plays of Bartellamus Cartwright are the toast of Talantier. Since the recent opening of his play "Sorcerer's Gamble," Cartwright's reputation has skyrocketed from "a worthless hack" to "the most esteemed dramatist in the city." But the bright light of a rising star casts long shadows. Whispers among Talantier's artistic elite tell a darker tale of Cartwright's sudden success, a tale fraught with plagiarism and murder. Word behind the scenes is that Draelor Vaultrand, a talented undiscovered playwright, is the actual author of "Sorcerer's Gamble" and "Swords of Dragonslake." Vaultrand vanished without a trace three months ago, along with the only manuscript of his collected plays.

Now the Night Raven Theater, venue of the upcoming "Swords of Dragonslake," is the stage for a dangerous showdown between mysterious foes. Their identities and insidious plans are hidden neatly in the subtext of the death of Talantier's most promising young writer, and their mad desire for revenge may spell curtains for the Night Raven's viewing elite.

"Swords of Dragonslake" is a D&D adventure of drama and intrigue in five acts designed for four 12th-level characters. This adventure embroils the PCs in the complex and highly pretentious theater circles of Talantier, drawing them into a web of revenge and murder most foul surrounding the upcoming opening of Bartellamus Cartwright's latest smash hit. This adventure is non-linear in its design and allows the PCs a great deal of freedom in their navigation of the plot and investigation of clues and leads. For this reason, you should read "Swords of Dragonslake" thoroughly before attempting to run it.

Adventure Background

Twenty years ago, Ye Olde Shadowplay Theater offered dazzling displays of drama to the citizens of Talantier. Great tales of lovers parted, kings laid low, and epic clashes between gods and demons were created with nothing more than fire, shadow, and puppets upon the tiny stage of this innocuous venue located at the end of Curtain Alley. The resident Shadow Company consisted of the humble Oshira family: a handsome dark-haired elf named Tarentos, his human wife Daralla with golden hair and eyes to match, their twelve-year-old daughter Karin, her younger sister Delia, and the family's technician, assistant puppeteer, and fast friend, the taciturn gnome Janton Wirespindle. The Shadow Company performed for the area's downtrodden, accepting donations rather than charging admission. The family never had much gold, but their toils earned them enough copper to make ends meet, and their life was filled with love and laughter.

This all changed one fateful day, when a lordling named Taluran Sentecore came to call at Ye Olde Shadowplay's door. Hefting a bulging sack of gold and bristling with ambitions of raising several gigantic new theaters from the ramshackle ghettos of Curtain Alley, Taluran offered to purchase Ye Olde Shadowplay from the Oshiras to complete his ownership of the neighborhood. He was anxious to begin tearing down the surrounding homes of the impoverished residents of Curtain Alley to make way for his visionary new theater district, and Ye Olde Shadowplay was nestled in the centre of his planned development site. Taluran was flabbergasted when the Oshira family refused his generous offer outright, not even giving his gold a second glance.

The lordling was not a man in the habit of taking no for an answer. Sentecore pulled the strings of his own puppet; a lieutenant in the Talantier Guard named Draxon Yurvos. Taluran paid Draxon to burn Ye Olde Shadowplay to the ground, clearing the way for progress.

Sentecore instructed the guardsman to destroy the theater, while leaving the Oshiras unharmed by the blaze, but Draxon bungled the job. When the fire raged beyond his control it consumed the entire backstage area of Ye Olde Shadowplay, reducing Talentos, his wife Daralla, and little Delia to ashes. Janton was burned near to death trying to save the family from the blaze, but in the end he only managed to rescue Karin. The girl watched her parents writhe and scream in the flames until they were reduced to nothing more than twisted blackened husks. Karin and Janton secretly fled the city, fearing further attack from thugs paid with Sentecore's coin. Meanwhile, Taluran abandoned his plans to purchase Curtain Alley, in fear of being implicated in the arson and murder of the Oshira family.

Now, thirteen years after the fire claimed her parent's lives, Karin has returned to Talantier, with a mute and scarred Janton Wirespindle in tow. She has blossomed into a breathtakingly beautiful young woman and a peerless performer, acting under the stage name Isadora Shade. Sentecore has grown powerful in her absence, rising to the office of Speaker of the City, though he is constantly tormented with guilt over his involvement in the Oshiras' death. Karin has cultivated her talents in order to get close to her foe, and her sinister plan for poetic vengeance is almost complete. Karin intends to murder Taluran Sentecore in full view of a full house of onlookers and get away clean, just as Sentecore got away with burning her parents and sister alive.

Shortly after returning to the city, Karin, under her assumed identity of Isadora Shade, met Draelor Vaultrand, a young playwright burning with talent yet undiscovered by Talantier's theatrical elite. Isadora seduced Draelor, convincing him to write parts for her into his scripts as she toyed mercilessly with his heart. But Draelor was too smart to serve as her pawn. Curious about this mysterious young half-elf of remarkable talent and beauty, and unsettled by her silent, scarred gnome companion, Vaultrand began to look into Isadora's background. The playwright discovered Karin's true identity, but Karin killed him before he could expose her.

Her new pawn is far more amenable to the role. Bartellamus Cartwright was languishing as an overweight clerk in a tiny bookbinding shop on Parchment Row when Karin discovered him. The talentless hack of a writer harbored dreams of some day ascending to the upper echelons of Talantier's literary elite, dreams which Karin could make reality. Bartellamus awakened one night to find his room unnaturally cold and an uninvited visitor standing by his bedside. A tall, dark woman, her entire sensual figure was veiled in black shrouds, and the voice that whispered from the void of darkness surrounding her face was so beautiful that at first Bartellemus believed himself to be dreaming. She gave him a manuscript entitled "Sorcerer's Gamble" written by Draelor Vaultrand, instructing the pudgy little clerk to re-pen it in his own hand and destroy the original.

At first Bartellamus did as he was bade out of fear, but over the next few weeks as his plagiarized manuscript gained renown, he prayed each night for another visit from The Dark Lady, as he began to call his secret muse. Now, he serves happily, even deluding himself into believing that he is somehow worthy of the attentions lavished upon him by the theatrical circles of Talantier. The second gift the Dark Lady handed Bartellamus was "Swords of Dragonslake." This masterpiece tells the tale of an elderly dragonslayer who comes out of retirement, abandoning his lady love and his life in one last quest to slay the dragon who drove him from his profession twenty years past. The Night Raven Theater, one of Talantier's oldest and most prestigious performing houses, immediately purchased it.

Karin, in her guise of Isadora Shade, easily beat out the other actresses auditioning for the role of Arinia, the tragic heroine of the story who lost her parents to dragonfire when a great red wyrm razed her family estate to the ground. Karin now bides her time, rehearsing her role with puissance, and preparing a special performance of her own for the debut of "Swords of Dragonslake:" murdering the man who ruined her life, the High Speaker of Talantier.

Adventure Synopsis

Investigating the mysterious disappearance of Draelor Vaultrand and the unexpected rise to stardom of the unlikely literary prodigy Bartellamus Cartwright, the PCs are drawn into the mysterious and highly pretentious theatrical circles of Talantier. The party's inquiries lead them to the Night Raven Theater. After either sneaking or cajoling their way inside, the PCs meet a long list of suspects. The party muddles through the information offered by these dramatis personae, sifting the truth from the fabrications of accomplished performers who lie for a living.

After their visit to the Night Raven the PCs have the option of pursuing numerous avenues of investigation. They may attempt to track down Brengen Leer, a half-orc mason and a sick fan of Isadora Shade who has been sending her dead flowers and obscene letters. The party might also decide to shadow Bartellamus Cartwright. Tailing the bookbinder-turned-playwright takes the PCs to the Long Whiskers Inn, a noted watering hole of actors, writers, and directors in Talantier's Curtain Quarter. There they either clash with Bartellamus and members of a vicious local gang called the Curtain Alley Players, or gain access to Cartwright's quarters at the Inn and discover the next manuscript of Draelor's he is currently re-scripting in his own hand.

If confronted, Bartellamus confesses his plagiarism, but insists he is innocent of any foul play involving the missing Draelor Vaultrand. If pressed hard he coughs up his muse, telling the party about the Dark Lady's midnight visitations.

From here the party may decide to investigate Desriya, a mysterious black-veiled dancer in "Swords of Dragonslake," if they have not done so already. Desriya is a nymph and an ex-assassin who is trying to leave her old life behind. She does not appreciate anyone searching her closet for the numerous skeletons she has tucked away, and may try to eliminate the PCs.

If the PCs keep their ears to the ground they learn of a mysterious Dark Lady seen skulking about the burned-out Olde Shadowplay Theater at the end of a lonesome stretch of Curtain Alley. There the party finds the body of Lieutenant Draxon Yurvos, a haunted man killed by Karen when his suspicions led him back to the old crime scene.

Exploring Ye Olde Shadowplay's burned-out innards, the PCs run afoul of horrific abominations summoned from the Plane of Shadow and face devious traps of Janton's design before finding the clue they need to discover Karin's true identity.

Finally, the adventure culminates as the curtain goes up at the debut performance of "Swords of Dragonslake." Isadora's twisted plan of vengeance unfolds along with the dramatic action of the play, and the party must avert the murder of Speaker Taluran Sentecore and save the lives of Talantier's viewing elite before the final curtain falls.

Adventure Hooks

Getting the PCs involved in this adventure is simply a matter of keying them in to Draelor Vaultrand's disappearance and giving them a motivation to investigate. Here are a few example hooks:

Talantier

The city of Talantier owes its prosperity to a famed half-elf diplomat by the name of Randall Willowsbreath, who negotiated a peace agreement between human settlers and the conclave of elves who had long resided in Talantier's outlands. The grand city was built as a cooperative effort of the humans and their sylvan neighbors. Talantier is heralded today as a bastion of peace and racial understanding and is known for its thriving art and theater communities.

Talantier (large city): conventional (town council), nonstandard (art scholar society), AL N; 40,000 gp limit; assets 70,824,000 gp; Population 24,400; integrated (human 56%, elven 30%, half-elf 10%, halfling 2%, dwarven 1%, other races 1%).

Authority Figures: **Grand Auteur Jacylen Byron**, LN female elf aristocrat 10/bard 6 (Head of the Art Scholars), **High Speaker Taluran Sentecore**, N male human aristocrat 4/rogue 8 (Speaker of the Town Council), **Captain Varina Talos**, LN female human monk 12/fighter 2 (Captain of the Guard, currently out East pursuing bugbear raiders).

Notes: Being involved in the arts is considered to be the most important civic duty of most residents. Artists and bards wishing to prove themselves often come to Talantier to make their mark. All visitors are welcome to the city, but most locals look down on those who have no interest in artistic pursuits.

- The Blue Feather Theater is a longtime rival of the Night Raven, and since the Raven's procurement of Bartellamus Cartwright's services as resident playwright, the Blue Feather's ticket sales have dipped considerably. The owners are the Moonwhelm Brothers, Silias (a full-blooded elf) and Gevran (a half-elf from another mother). They rarely get along, but both have heard the rumors of Cartwright's plagiarism, and would like nothing more than get their hands on Vaultrand's original manuscripts. They offer the PCs a tidy sum in gold to find the lost plays.
- Cartwright's quick ascension to the upper ranks of Talantier's theater circles has ruffled more than a few feathers. Bartellamus 'senjoyment of his newfound admiration and respect has incited him to mistreat several esteemed playwrights who once mocked his own meager attempts at dramatic literature. One such playwright is a wealthy halfling dilettante named Dantron Weathertull, heir to the Weathertull vineyard fortune and the former resident playwright of the Night Raven Theater. Dantron despises the pudgy bookbinder-turned-playwright, and would like nothing more than to see Cartwright unveiled for the fraud he is. He is willing to invest a large portion of his inheritance in the services of industrious adventurers who can expose Bartellamus' plagiarism.
- Vaultrand interviewed several sages and even an ancient dragon while conducting research for several of his plays, and it is rumored that the secrets to finding a long-hidden artifact of power are penned down somewhere in one of his manuscripts entitled "By the Sword."

Dramatis Personae

"Swords of Dragonslake" steeps the party in the theatrical circles of Talantier, a society in which smiles hide infidelities, betrayal, and even murder. People of the theater are naturally duplicitous and are masters of hiding their true feelings. The party should find most NPCs they encounter to be charming, polite, and (at least seemingly) willing to help them. They all helpfully point fingers at other people, sending the PCs chasing shadows around Talantier. By the time the PCs near the adventure's conclusion, they should be unable to trust anyone and completely fed up with the revolting level of insincerity they have to overcome.

The Dark Diva

Karin Oshira is a woman with two passions: fame and revenge. She is an intelligent and enterprising young half-elf who intends to rise to the top of Talantier's theater elite and watch her enemies fall along the way. Witnessing her parents' death by fire has turned her into a heartless killer who places all other people into one of two categories: pawns or enemies. The only person she cares for is Janton, who saved her from her parents' fate.

Karin takes after her elven father, and her long, lustrous black hair frames her heart-shaped face. Her mother's eyes stare out from beneath her dark locks like pools of molten gold. Karin's voice is coldly beautiful, soft and sibilant like a siren's song. Her constant dance and performance training has honed her body to perfection, and she moves with a sultry gait sure to attract the eye of any man within 500 yards. Sensuality is just another weapon for Karin, who uses her body to enslave men's hearts or lure enemies to their deaths. She has cultivated a feigned vulnerability, which she uses to melt the heart of anyone she meets.

Gather Information

DC 15: "A new arrival to Talantier, Isadora is remarkably talented and possesses a simple soul and kind heart, not often found amongst theater folk."

DC 20: "She really embraces her role in 'Swords of Dragonslake.' Her understanding of the character is uncanny."

DC 25: "She has training from some far-off academy, but she's definitely no stranger to this city. You can take the girl out of Talantier, but you can't take the Talantier out of the girl."

DC 30: "She was close with Draelor Vaultrand, that one. Rumor has it they were lovers."

DC 35: "She is sleeping with Vizmier. I don't know what she sees in him."

DC 40: "She knows that hideous little gnome who hides in the rafters. They never speak to each other, but you can tell they know each other from somewhere."

Karin Oshira (Isadora Shade) CR 13
Female half-elf bard 7/shadowdancer 6
NE Medium humanoid
Init +3; **Senses** darkvision 60 feet., low-light vision; Listen +11, Spot +4
Languages Common, Draconic, Elven, Gnome, Infernal

AC 18, touch 18, flat-footed 15; Dodge, improved uncanny dodge
hp 63 (13 HD)

Fort +7, **Ref** +16, **Will** +12; evasion

Spd 30 ft.

Melee +3 *shortsword* +15/+10 (1d6+4/19–20)

Base Atk +9; **Grp** +10

Atk Options Ironskin Chant, bardic music 7/day (countersong, *fascinate*, inspire courage +1, inspire competence, *suggestion*)

Combat Gear *potion of barkskin, potion of cure serious wounds*

Bard Spells Known (CL 7th)

3rd (1/day)—*displacement, glibness*

2nd (3/day)—*cat's grace, darkness, heroism, hold person* (DC 17)

1st (4/day)—*expeditious retreat, obscure object, silent image, Tasha's hideous laughter* (DC 16)

0 (4/day)—*dancing lights, detect magic, ghost sound, know direction, mending, message*

Abilities Str 12, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 14, Cha 20

SQ bardic knowledge, defensive roll, hide in plain sight, trapfinding, trap sense +2

Feats Combat Reflexes, Disguise Spell, Dodge, Ironskin Chant, Mobility, Weapon Finesse

Skills Balance +16, Bluff +21, Concentration +12, Diplomacy +14, Disguise +18, Escape Artist +19, Hide +15, Jump +8, Listen +13, Move Silently +15, Perform (act) +17, Perform (dance) +10, Perform (puppetry) +13, Perform (sing) +17, Search +6, Spot +4, Sense Motive +7, Tumble +19

Possessions combat gear, *+3 shortsword, ring of protection +5, cloak of resistance +3,* 2 onyx bracelets (300 gp each), a single onyx earring painstakingly carved into the likeness of a raven with tiny ruby eyes (500 gp), emerald-studded white silk gloves (1,000 gp), enchanted musical locket of silver inlaid with pearls (2,000 gp)

Isadora

The Silent Puppetmaster

Adopted from the streets as a young gnome by the Oshiras, Janton Wirespindle displayed an uncommon knack for engineering, invention, and puppetry. Janton was a quiet gnome before the fire that gutted Ye Olde Shadowplay burned his only true friends alive. He has not spoken a word since. The flames took his home, his adopted family, and his face. All he has now is his adopted little sister Karin, and his cold hunger for vengeance.

Janton's face is a mass of hard scar tissue more resembling a burnt leather mask than a man. His sharp eyes peek out from misshapen lumps of crusted flesh, and his black teeth leer out from a lipless mouth. His body is taut and corded like the steel wires and cables he works with, capable of snapping out with surprising force and speed.

Gather Information

DC 15: "He doesn't talk much, and he's not much to look at, but he is the most skilled theater technician this town has ever seen, that's certain!"

DC 20: "Devoted to his work, that one. He spends day and night up in them rafters making sure everything is working smoothly. Night Raven's old,

Karin's Feats

Disguise Spell: Karin can make a Perform check as part of the action used to cast a spell. Onlookers must make a Spot check with a DC equal to her Perform check result to detect that she cast a spell. As long as the spell does not visibly emanate from her, and observers don't have some other means of determining its source, they don't know where the effect came from.

Ironskin Chant: As a swift action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity, Karin can expend one daily use of her bardic music to provide DR 5/— to herself or one ally within 30 feet that can hear her. This effect lasts until the start of her next turn.

without him she'd doubtless be falling down around the audience's ears."

DC 25 (or DC 20 Heal Check): "Burn scars they be. He won't talk about it...he doesn't talk about anything."

DC 30: "Good with his hands! Not just with wires and ropes, too—he's a devil of a shot with a crossbow. Saw the little fella practicing on some rats in the back alley one night."

DC 40: "Them gnomes are good with pulleys and knots. But I only knew one other as good as this one. The little fella worked at Ye Olde Shadowplay afore it burnt down."

JANTON WIRESPINDLE **CR 15**
Male gnome rogue 9/fighter 6
NE Small humanoid
Init +4; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +15, Spot +7
Languages Common, Draconic, Elven, Gnome, Undercommon

AC 24, touch 15, flat-footed 20; improved uncanny dodge
hp 81 (15 HD)
Fort +9, **Ref** +12, **Will** +6 (+8 vs. illusion); evasion

Spd 30 ft.
Melee +3 *shocking burst gnome hooked hammer* +18 (1d6+4/x3 plus 1d6 electricity) or
+3 *shocking burst gnome hooked hammer* +16/+11/+6 (1d6+4/x3 plus 1d6 electricity) and
+3 *shocking burst gnome hooked hammer* +13/+8 (1d4/x4)
Ranged mwk repeating light crossbow +20 (1d6+4/19–20) or
mwk repeating light crossbow +18/+18/+13/+8 (1d6+4/19–20)
Base Atk +12; **Grp** +9
Atk Options Improved Precise Shot, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, poison use, sneak attack +5d6
Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds* (2), *potion of enlarge person* (2), *ring of ram* (32 charges)
Spell-like Abilities (CL 15th)
1/day—*dancing lights, ghost sound, speak with animals* (burrowing only), *prestidigitation*

Abilities Str 13, Dex 19, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 12, Cha 10
SQ trapfinding, trap sense +3
Feats Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Repeating Crossbow), Improved Precise Shot, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (gnome hooked hammer), Weapon Focus (repeating crossbow), Weapon Specialization (repeating crossbow)
Skills Balance +14, Climb +7 (+9 ropes), Craft (puppets) +18, Craft (traps) +17, Disable Device +14, Disguise +6, Escape Artist +16 (+18 ropes), Hide +20, Jump +13, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +9, Listen +15, Move Silently +16, Open Lock +10, Perform (puppetry) +12, Profession (stagehand) +8, Search +6, Sleight of Hand +10, Spot +9, Tumble +12, Use Rope +10 (+12 bindings)
Possessions combat gear, *+2 studded leather armor*, masterwork light repeating crossbow with 20 *+2 adamantine bolts* and 1 *+1 flaming bolt*, *+3 shocking burst gnome hooked hammer*, *amulet of natural armor +4*, *boots of striding and springing*, 10 doses of giant wasp poison (Injury DC 18, 1d6 Dex/1d6 Dex), 2 doses of deathblade (Injury DC 20, 1d6 Con/2d6 Con), masterwork tools on a leather tool belt, black stagehand's outfit with veil and mask

The Lord of Illusions

A petty man filled with rancor at his lot in life, Vizmier Rathor once held dreams of teaching in the hallowed halls of an arcane academy. Instead fate dumped him in Talantier's Curtain Quarter, where he's forced to whore himself out as a cheap trickster, using his potent magic to delight a pack of fat guffawing fools paying to see the latest drivel tramped out on stage. Rathor is not even sure why the Night Raven bothers employing actors anymore, as he would be happy to supply the stage with illusionary characters capable of more drama than these so-called "performers" could ever aspire to.

The only exception to his disdain for actors is the newly arrived Isadora Shade. The alluring young ingénue's performance in early rehearsals of "Swords of Dragonslake" moved Vizmier to tears, and he was amazed when she responded to his clumsy advances. He is now romantically involved with Isadora, his mad love clouding his already shaky judgment. Vizmier has become mixed up in Isadora's plot for vengeance, and obeys her commands without even having the good sense to ask why. At her whim he has dominated Brengen Grenton Leer, orchestrating the mason's erratic behavior and harassment of Isadora. Throughout the course of the adventure he also does everything in his power to bring hardship to the PCs.

Vizmier is a thin, frail man of twenty-four years in simple black robes. Though still young, his hair is receding and his face sags like that of a man twice his age.

Gather Information

DC 15: "Got no love of the stage, that one. He wanted to teach magic—specializes in illusions, you know."

DC 20: "Studied with Thaddius Tannenbaum III, famous art collector and illusionist here in Talantier. Guess he wasn't as good as his classmate, since he's stuck working the Curtain Quarter."

DC 30: "He only stays on for the women, really—rumor has it he's obsessed with Isadora Shade."

DC 40: "I heard Isadora appreciates the attention, if ya get my meaning!"

VIZMIER RATHOR **CR 12**
Male human Illusionist 12
CN Medium humanoid
Init +5; **Senses** Listen +0, Spot +0
Languages Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Sylvan

AC 16, touch 16, flat-footed 15
hp 58 (12 HD)
Fort +6, **Ref** +5, **Will** +8

Spd 30 ft.
Melee +1 *dagger* +6/+1 (1d4/19–20)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +5
Combat Gear scroll of *shield other*, *wand of major image* (18 charges), *wand of suggestion* (12 charges)
Spells Prepared (CL 12th [CL 14th to overcome SR])
6th—*mass suggestion* (DC 20), *flesh to stone* (DC 20), *programmed image* (DC 22)
5th—*cloudkill* (DC 19), *dominate person* (DC 19), *persistent image* (DC 21), *seeming* (DC 21)
4th—*dimension door*, *greater invisibility*, *Otiluke's resilient sphere* (DC 18), *phantasmal killer* (DC 20), *rainbow*

pattern (DC 20)

3rd—*displacement, fly, haste, hold person* (DC 17), *major image* (DC 19), *slow* (DC 17)

2nd—*mirror image, misdirection* (DC 18), *scorching ray, see invisibility, shatter* (DC 16), *spider climb*

1st—*charm person* (DC 15), *disguise self, feather fall, obscuring mist, silent image* (DC 17), *ventriloquism* (DC 17)

0—*detect magic* (2), *prestidigitation, read magic*

Prohibited Schools abjuration and necromancy

Abilities Str 8, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 18, Wis 10, Cha 10

SQ *contingency* (as soon as reduced to below 20 hp casts *blink*)

Feats Dodge, Eschew Materials, Forge Ring, Greater Spell Focus (illusion), Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Bluff), Spell Focus (illusion), Spell Penetration

Skills Bluff +10, Concentration +17, Decipher Script +12, Knowledge (arcana) +19, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +14, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +12, Profession (stage illusionist) +10, Spellcraft +21, Sleight of Hand +8

Possessions combat gear, *+1 dagger, ring of protection +5* (matches Isadora's), black stage illusionist robes, ivory statuette worth 1,500 gp (focus for *contingency*)

Spellbook as above plus: 0—all except abjuration and necromancy, 1—*animate rope, color spray, grease, identify, jump, magic missile*; 2—*alter self, blur, darkness, glitterdust, web*; 3—*blink, keen edge, sepia snake sigil, stinking cloud*; 4—*detect scrying, Leomund's secure shelter, scrying, stone shape*; 5—*dream, mirage arcana, teleport*, 6—*contingency*

Dancer of Death

Desriya is fleeing a dark past, filled with shady associates and multiple murders. The rebellious young nymph fled the idyllic confines of her meadow home at an early age, following a band of adventurers to the big city to learn what life among the humanoids was like. She got a rough lesson. The adventurers she traveled with took her captive shortly after they left the forests of her kin and sold her to the highest bidder. A mysterious old man she would only know as Shadowmaster purchased her and began her brutal training in the killing arts. Half-starved and beaten into delirium on a daily basis, the nymph soon followed any orders her master gave her. Desriya's natural abilities proved useful to the master assassin, and she quickly honed her skills under the vicious tutelage of the Shadowmaster. She killed dozens of men, women, and children at his behest before she was able to break free of his watchful gaze. Now she has fled as far as her fey feet could carry her and taken refuge in Talantier. She hopes to begin a new life, and resents anyone prying into her dark past.

Desriya is considered beautiful even among nymphs—needless to say, her unveiled charms could easily drop most humanoid onlookers dead in their tracks. For this reason, Desriya shrouds her perfect figure and flawless face behind black veils at all times, making it easy to mistake her for Bartellamus's muse, the Dark Lady. In the solitary confines of her lily pond (outside of Talantier), she wears only gossamer gowns, leaving her alluring figure in plain view of anyone foolish enough to encroach upon her sanctuary.

Gather Information

DC 15: "The best dancer in Talantier, hands down! What a body, too! Shame no one's ever seen her face... she must be hideous."

DC 20: "She doesn't take kindly to fans, or to anyone for that matter. Best stay away from her."

DC 30: "Some folks came around looking for her a while back. Shady types, they were, in black leather and carrying cold iron blades. They disappeared shortly after they arrived."

DC 35: "They say she takes trips into the forest groves south of the city limits in her limited free time between rehearsals."

Desriya CR 15

Female nymph assassin 8

CN Medium fey

Init +4; **Senses** low-light vision, Listen +19, Spot +16

Languages Common, Draconic, Druidic, Elven, Sylvan, Terran

Aura blinding beauty (DC 20)

AC 21, touch 21, flat-footed 17; uncanny dodge

hp 72 (14 HD) **DR** 10/cold iron

Fort +12 (+16 vs. poison), **Ref** +22, **Will** +18

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Spd 30 ft.
Melee unarmed +16/+11 (1d3+3)
Ranged mwk dart +14/+9 (1d4)
Base Atk +9; **Grp** +9
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Feint, Stunning Fist 3/day (DC 21), death attack (DC 23), poison use, sneak attack +4d6
Special Actions stunning glance (DC 20)
Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds*
Assassin Spells Known (CL 8th)
4th (2/day)—*freedom of movement, greater invisibility, modify memory* (DC 19)
3rd (4/day)—*deep slumber* (DC 18), *false life, misdirection* (DC 18), *nondetection*
2nd (4/day)—*alter self, fox's cunning, invisibility, undetectable alignment*
1st (5/day)—*detect poison, feather fall, ghost sound, true strike*
Druid Spells Prepared (CL 7th; +13 ranged touch)
4th—*air walk, flame strike* (DC 18)
3rd—*cure moderate wounds, poison* (DC 17), *protection from energy*
2nd—*barkskin, bear's endurance, cat's grace, warp wood*
1st—*cure light wounds, faerie fire, longstrider, pass without trace, produce flame*
0—*cure minor wounds, detect magic, guidance, light, mending, purify food and drink*
Spell-like Abilities (CL 7)
1/day—*dimension door*

Abilities Str 10, Dex 19, Con 13, Int 20, Wis 19, Cha 24
SQ hide in plain sight, wild empathy +13
Feats Combat Expertise, Improved Feint, Improved Unarmed Strike, Stunning Fist, Weapon Finesse
Skills Balance +14, Bluff +15, Concentration +10, Diplomacy +20, Disguise +13, Escape Artist +19 (+21 ropes), Heal +10, Hide +17, Jump +4, Listen +19, Move Silently +17, Perform (dance) +12, Sense Motive +12, Spot +16, Swim +12, Tumble +14, Use Rope +8 (+10 bindings)
Possessions combat gear, *amulet of mighty fists* +3, black silk veils and scarves, two emerald hairpins (fashioned as masterwork darts, 20 gp each), black silk leotard, black dance shoes

The Spellbound Stalker

Brengen Leer hates the theater. He attended once on a trip arranged by the headmistress of his orphanage and swore he would never again have hours of his life stolen from him in such a fashion. He is a simple half-orc mason, a skilled laborer under contract with Talantier's Stoneshard Guild. Unfortunately for Brengen, his lauded experience as a sniper with the militia during Talantier's last conflict with the bugbear tribes to the East makes him the perfect fall-guy for Karin's insidious assassination plot. Since his domination by Vizmier, Brengen has been acting under orders to appear obsessed with Isadora Shade, sending her dead flowers, sending obscene letters written in his own blood, and building a shrine in his room at the Stoneshard Guild. Usually a clean-cut half-orc with a closely shaven head and face, Brengen has become a grizzly, unkempt mess of stubble and grime since falling under Vizmier's spell.

Brengen

Gather Information

DC 15: "An honest half-orc, and a diligent worker in the Stoneshard Guild."

DC 20: "Served Talantier well in the last bugbear war. Saw a lot of action out there."

DC 30: "Brengen was one of the best snipers in the Talantier militia. Shot the spines off a manticore's tail at 100 paces. Hunts with Old Graigor Ramsen in the East wood sometimes."

DC 40: "Brengen? He hates the theater, can't stand it."

Brengen Grenton Leer CR 7
Male half-orc expert 6/fighter 4
LN Medium humanoid (orc)
Init +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +4, Spot +0
Languages Common

AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16
hp 66 (10 HD)
Fort +8, **Ref** +7, **Will** +6

Spd 30 ft.
Melee +2 *adamantine warhammer* +14/+9 (1d8+5/x3) or
mwk club +13/+8 (1d6+4)
Ranged mwk heavy crossbow +12 (1d10+3/19–20)
Base Atk +8; **Grp** +12
Atk Options Improved Sunder, Power Attack
Combat Gear *potion of bull's strength*

Abilities Str 19, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 8

Feats Die Hard, Endurance, Improved Sunder, Lightning Reflexes, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (warhammer), Weapon Specialization (warhammer)

Skills Balance +7, Climb +11, Disable Device +4, Intimidate +7, Jump +11, Listen +4, Open Lock +3, Profession (mason) +6, Use Rope +7

Possessions combat gear, *+2 chain shirt*, *+2 adamantine warhammer*, masterwork steel club, tools, leather work breeches and jacket, hard leather boots

The Plagiarizing Playwright

Bartellamus Cartwright is a man deceived from without and within. The unwitting pawn of Isadora Shade's murder plot, Cartwright has also convinced himself he is an artist. Since receiving his third script of Draelor's, entitled "A Day of Crimson Twilight," he has taken to making miniscule alterations to Vaultrand's work, which he fancies improvements. In truth, he is butchering pure poetry with his own feeble attempts at verse. Cartwright is a spineless bag of wind, who talks big now that he is surrounded by sycophantic hangers-on. If accused or challenged in any way he blusters in outrage, but blanches if threatened with genuine violence.

Bartellamus is a doughy pig of a man, bound up tight in silk finery. A bushy unibrow crowns his plump face, threatening to overtake his tiny, beady eyes.

Gather Information

DC 15: "Who would have thought that such genius would be hiding behind the counter at a bookbinding shop?"

DC 20: "Bartellamus locks himself in his room at the Long Whiskers Inn after the premiere of each of his plays and begins writing the next one. He works day and night for a week to finish."

DC 25: "I read some of Cartwright's earlier works. They're really nothing in comparison to his recent masterpieces."

DC 30: "In fact his older works were atrociously bad, some of the worst attempts at verse I have offended my eyes with."

DC 40: "Rumor has it Bartellamus' recent plays bear an uncanny resemblance to the work of the late Draelor Vaultrand."

Bartellamus Cartwright (Male CN Human Expert 4): Skills: Bluff +7, Craft (bookbinding) +9, Decipher Script +12, Diplomacy +7, Forgery +9, Perform (act) +2, Profession (playwright) +6; Will +5.

The Penitent Politician

Taluran Sentecore has always sought to better himself. As the son of a wealthy lord, he grew up aimless and without purpose, seeking only to somehow make his own name in the world and crawl out from under his father's shadow. In his fiery youth he sometimes put his plans for prestige and recognition above the suffering of others. After the incident at Ye Olde Shadowplay, he saw the horror perpetrated by unchecked ambition, and has since reformed his ways. He never confessed his involvement in the fire and has attempted to wipe away all traces of his relationship with Draxon Yurvos, never speaking to the guardsman again after he bungled the arson that cost the Oshiras their lives. Taluran flees his wracking guilt by attempting to atone for his crime through good deeds. He has grown into one of Talantier's most benevolent Speakers, even bringing his family's considerable assets to bear in times of economic crisis. Thinking of the good his efforts has wrought sometimes even allows him to forget the blood on his hands.

Taluran was a rotund lad in his youth. He is now gaunt-faced and rail-thin, his body worn by the cares of his office. His eyes are sunken and ringed with age lines. To the astute observer his forced smiles betray a tormented spirit.

Gather Information

DC 15: "Done right by this town he has, seen us through some hard times against the bugbears and his generosity with his own wealth has kept Talantier strong."

DC 20: "Don't sleep so good from what I hear. Nightmares."

DC 30: "Sure, he's a great man! I'm just saying he wasn't always so. Back in the old days he was a spitfire of a young lord who'd stop at nothing to get his own way."

DC 35: "He used to pay Lieutenant Draxon Yurvos to take care of matters best left unsaid."

DC 40: "They say he's behind the fire that burned out Ye Olde Shadowplay Theater."

Speaker Taluran Sentecore **CR 10**

Male human aristocrat 4/rogue 8
LN Medium humanoid

Init +4; **Senses** Listen +10, Spot +2

Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven, Sylvan

AC 14, touch 14, flat-footed 10; Dodge, improved uncanny dodge

hp 33 (12 HD)

SR 20

Fort +2, **Ref** +10, **Will** +10; evasion

Spd 30 ft.

Melee *+1 dagger of venom* +14/+9 (1d4+1/19–20)

Base Atk +9; **Grp** +9

Atk Options Combat Expertise, sneak attack +4d6

Combat Gear *wand of charm person* (32 charges), *wand of cure light wounds* (45 charges), *wand of eagle's splendor* (15 charges)

Abilities Str 10, Dex 19, Con 8, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 18

SQ trapfinding, trap sense +2

Feats Combat Expertise, Dodge, Iron Will, Leadership, Persuasive, Weapon Finesse

Skills Appraise +11, Bluff +19, Decipher Script +9, Diplomacy +25, Forgery +13, Gather Information +18, Hide +12, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (local) +18, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +9, Listen +10, Move Silently +12, Perform (sing) +10, Sense Motive +11, Spot +11, Use Magic Device +16 (+18 scrolls).

Possessions combat gear, *+1 dagger of venom*, *ring of mind shielding*, *scarab of protection*, white satin cloak trimmed with unicorn mane (500 gp), deep blue waistcoat with gold links sewn across the chest (200 gp), large flawless ruby set in a pendant carved like the open maw of a red dragon (3,000 gp), various other assorted fine garments

The Leading Man

Rikard Prett is one of Talantier's most celebrated artists and performers. He has been one of Curtain Quarter's leading

Night Raven Map Key

1. Lobby
2. Coat Room
3. Lounge
4. Box Office
5. Office
6. Bloodrain's Office
7. House Entrance
9. House
10. Stage
11. Wings
12. Side Stages
14. Props & Sets
15. General Dressing Room
16. Isadora's Dressing Room
17. Privy
18. Desriya's Dressing Room
19. Vizmeir's Room
20. Rikard Prett's Dressing Room
21. Green Room
22. Costume Shop
23. Box Seating
24. Bloodrain's Bedroom
25. Balcony Seating
26. Outer Balcony (Mezzanine)

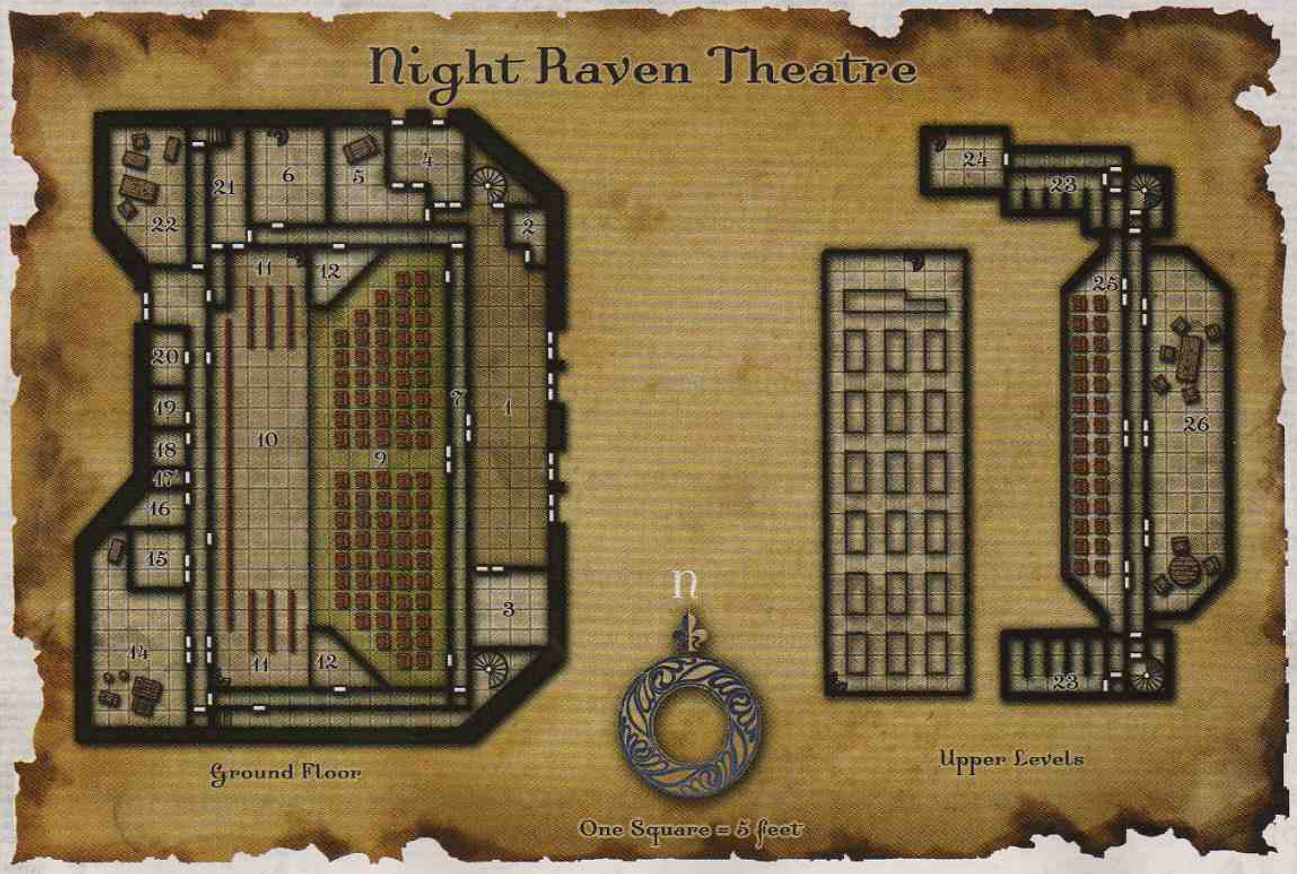
men for the past ten years and his name on the marquee is a guaranteed draw, pulling in hundreds of devoted fans—most of them young women. Rikard is the proud winner of seven Greensburrows, the most prestigious award for dramatic performance in Talantier. His chief rival is Gregor Vane, also a seven-time Greensburrow winner. Rikard plans to one-up the snide thespian by winning this year's Leading Man Greensburrow for his stellar portrayal of the male lead in "Swords of Dragonslake," Sir Mandavar, the aging knight who tragically abandons his young lover Arinia in order to hunt down the dragon who nearly killed him twenty years ago. Rikard is not a physical threat to the PCs—though his acting flair allows him to appear quite skilled with a blade, he has never actually battled anyone.

The real threat he poses the party is in his pathological lying and his remarkable talent for it. The actor oozes charisma, and loves to talk to potential fans (like the PCs). Rikard firmly believes Isadora's story about a stalker named Brengen Grenton Leer, and attests to the PCs that he has seen the malevolent half-orc creeping about the theater on more than one occasion and had to frighten the thug off. (This is wholly untrue, but Rikard's talent at acting is so prodigious he often deludes himself into believing his own performances.) Isadora has also suggested to Rikard that Brengen was obsessed with Draelor Vaultrand as well, and Rikard will tout this as fact to any PC who listens. Additionally, he is extremely suspicious of Desriya. Her imperviousness to his advances has assured him that she is up to no good, and he will cast suspicions her way as well if the PCs ask him about her. The PCs are welcome to attempt Sense Motive checks against Rikard's Bluffs, but as he is a man who lies for a living, the party may be hard pressed to see through his fabrications.

Rikard Prett (Male CN Half-elf Expert 18): Skills Bluff +30, Diplomacy +25, Intimidate +28, Perform (acting) +29, Perform (sing) +26; Will +14

ACT I: The Night Raven Theater

An eccentric half-elf named Nathaniel Bloodrain reopened the Night Raven,



one of the oldest and most esteemed venues in Talantier, three years ago. Bloodrain is a bit of a mystery to most locals, as he has no kin in Talantier and keeps to himself. Rumors circulate that the Night Raven's owner is a vampire, an image Nathaniel himself encourages to garner publicity for the theater, and of course to attract young socialites to his bed. Nathaniel takes this façade quite seriously, dressing in gothic attire at all times and never appearing publicly during daylight hours (his active night life keeps him abed until well after the noon hour anyways).

It is easy to see what would attract a vampiric fraud to the Night Raven. The theater's exterior cuts an imposing figure on the main drag of the Curtain Quarter, its towering gothic spires adorned with dozens of hideous gargoyles dwarfing the humble venues crouched in its shadow. A large open-air balcony 70 feet above the theater's lobby entrance offers patrons an intermission view of Talantier proper and the starry canopy above. The interior is equally impressive, with red velvet curtains and hanging tapestries exhibiting scenes from better known plays in the classic Talantier cannon.

The audience seating area is two-tiered with a baroque balcony area overhanging the floor seating. The balcony seating is divided into separate booths where many of the rich and famous of Talantier enjoy a bird's-eye view of the dramatic action. Many of the true theater fanatics among Talantier's elite forgo the luxury of the booths in order to acquire seats down front and center. There they sit captivated, almost sucked up into the action themselves. Speaker Taluran Sentecore himself prefers these front center floor seats and his presence in the first row on premiere night at the Night Raven is guaranteed.

Scene 1. Getting Inside (EL Varies)

Gaining entry to the Night Raven any time in the three days before the debut performance is no easy task. In the hectic throes of "hell week" the cast and crew are constantly rehearsing or making last minute alterations to the set, costumes, lighting, and props. Most of the crew catches what little snippets of sleep afforded them inside the theater, and even in the darkest hours of the early morning the Night Raven is buzzing with activity. The front doors remain chained and bolted to prevent any overly curious spectators from catching a sneak peak of the rehearsals, leaving only the backstage door and balcony as viable means of accessing the theater's interior.

The backstage door is guarded against entry by members of the Curtain Alley Players, local thugs with a fanatical devotion to theater. PCs may attempt to sneak past them with the aid of *invisibility* or try to Bluff their way inside. Any character who takes the time to Listen to the thugs' conversation learns that the Night Raven has employed a number of new stagehands to assist with "hell week" and that the thugs "can't keep all the new faces straight." In addition to stagehands, the PCs may pose as members of the press, interested investors, producers, or any other viable disguise the party dreams up. Encourage their creativity and see what they can do, though any PC not dressed the part automatically fails any attempt to talk their way past the Curtain Alley Players.

If the party attempts to force their way inside, they earn the enmity of not only the cast, the crew, and their devoted thugs, but also the Town Guard of Talantier, which doesn't take kindly to strangers interfering with theater. The guard quickly responds to any disturbance surrounding the theater. If the fighting is particularly noisy, it draws the attention of the cast and Vizmier and Desriya join the fight to repulse any malicious intruders. Karin simply swoons with fear, Janton remains hidden unless for some reason the PCs threaten Karin, and Rikard alternates between blustering and cowering, depending on who's watching him.

Curtain Alley Players (8) CR 7
Male human rogue 3/fighter 4
CN Medium humanoid
Init +6; **Senses** Listen +7, Spot +7
Languages Common

AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16
hp 42 (7 HD)

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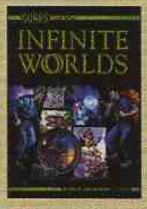

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Fort +6, **Ref** +6, **Will** +5; evasion

Spd 30 ft.

Melee mwk shortsword +10 (1d6+4/19–20) or 2 mwk shortswords +8/+8/+3 (1d6+4/19–20)

Ranged mwk dagger +9/+4 (1d4+2/19–20)

Base Atk +6; **Grp** +8

Atk Options Quick Draw, sneak attack +2d6

Combat Gear *potion of barkskin* (+3), *potion of haste*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 12

SQ trapfinding, trap sense +1

Feats Improved Unarmed Strike, Iron Will, Quick Draw, Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (shortsword), Weapon Specialization (shortsword)

Skills Climb +7, Diplomacy +8, Intimidate +11, Jump +8, Knowledge (local) +5, Listen +7, Perform (act) +3, Sense Motive +7, Spot +7, Tumble +6

Possessions combat gear, masterwork chainmail, 2 masterwork shortswords, 2 masterwork daggers, black and red cloaks, hard leather boots, tragedy and comedy mask motif vestcoats, tragedy or comedy masks worn on face

Scene 2. Searching the Premises

If the PCs wish to investigate the Night Raven after gaining access, they may do so as long as they avoid detection. The dressing rooms and the costume shop are vacant for most of the rehearsal. Searching each dressing room turns up the following:

Rikard Prett: Rikard's room is near wall to wall with framed paintings, most of them renderings of himself in some of his favorite roles over the last few years. In one he is dressed in princely attire complete with frilled sleeves and a stately blue-black overcoat, his long locks dyed black and draped about his shoulders, his eyes glinting with malice. In another he wears a leather straight jacket, peering out at the viewer with the clouded eyes of a tortured half-wit. In a third he is glamered to look like a tall and daring kobold with shining black scales, though his piercing eyes are unmistakably his own. The latter role was lauded as "a particularly daring character choice" by Talantier's Greensburrow Guild. Prett's dressing table drawers contain his masterwork disguise kit.

Isadora Shade: Isadora's dressing room is spartan, containing only her overcoat and hard boots. In the drawer of her dressing table is a small statue of a smiling white elephant standing on its rear legs, formerly Delia's favorite toy. The elephant is blackened slightly on one side. A DC 25 Search check reveals that the elephant's trunk is actually a cleverly disguised crank. When turned, chimes concealed inside the elephant play a lilting lullaby.

If any PC in Isadora's dressing room succeeds on a DC 25 Search check, they also notice traces of a strange reddish dust on Isadora's boots. A DC 20 Survival or Craft (alchemy) check reveals this substance to be ash from some sort of burned material. The ash on Isadora's boots is from the substage area of Ye Olde Shadowplay where the intense heat of the fire twenty years ago burned several saminite shadow screens in storage to ash (see Act IV for details).

Finally in the closet of Isadora's dressing room the party finds a bouquet of dead roses, and a letter penned in Brengen Grenton Leer's clumsy hand describing his hopes for a "tryst" with Isadora in the woods outside of town. The grisly "outing" he describes culminates in her dismemberment and death.

Desriya: The only sign this dressing room is even in use is an array of hair ornaments on the dressing table and a vase filled with particularly fragrant and beautiful orchids. Any PC succeeding on a DC 20 Search or Craft (weaponsmithing) check may note that the hair ornaments are actually cleverly disguised masterwork throwing darts. Any PC succeeding on a DC 25 Knowledge (nature) Check is instantly aware that the orchids are an extremely rare breed, and non-indigenous to the Talantier area, though they are obviously freshly picked. These orchids only grow in Desriya's grove south of town. If the PCs take the time to inquire, local druids, rangers, or woodsmen reveal the grove as the only source of the flowers and point the PCs in the right direction.

Vizmier: Vizmier's dressing room is cluttered with all manner of tomes, spare black robes, jars of enchanted hair regenerative ointment, and the stray half-eaten meat pie. A DC 30 Search check reveals a hidden compartment in Vizmier's dressing table drawer with a diamond-and-opal-studded ring inside. The ring bears an inscription: "To my dearest, by my love you shall fear no flame." This is a *ring of major fire resistance* that Vizmier painstakingly crafted for Isadora. After a night of impassioned lovemaking Isadora tearfully confessed her fear that her death was not far off, and that she is plagued by nightmares in which she is burnt alive. This stunning performance and a few subtle hints is all it took to set Vizmier expending his resources to craft this ring (as well as the *ring of protection +5* she now wears, which the illusionist gave her last week). If the party does not discover the *ring of major fire resistance* concealed here before opening night, Vizmier gives it to Isadora.

Fly Rail and Grid: In addition to the dressing rooms, the PCs may decide to investigate the grid-like iron catwalks and rafters above the stage from which moving scenery pieces, a large dragon puppet, shadow screens, and heavy sandbag counterweights are suspended. The grid is crawling with technicians and Janton Wirespindle, so unless the PCs have succeeded in disguising themselves as members of the crew they will have to make Hide checks to go unnoticed. Allow the techies Spot checks at +3. Janton also makes Spot checks to notice hidden PCs or see through their disguises.

Cast-iron spiral stairs in the wings on either side of the stage rise to the grid and fly rail 70 feet above the stage. The grid is unsafe, and no one heads up to it but those highly trained in the technical elements of theater. Every round a DC 5 Balance or Climb check is required to move across the grid. Failure results in a plummet to the stage below.

If a PC on the grid level succeeds at a DC 30 Search check, they notice that many of the pulley systems have been tinkered with recently to allow quick

release of their weight loads, specifically the chandeliers hanging above the front section of the audience.

Scene 3. Cornering the Cast

Once inside, the party finds most of the actors hard at work on stage and can catch glimpses of their awe-inspiring performances, albeit interrupted on many occasions by line-flubs, technical errors with the scenery, or disapproving rants by Nathaniel Bloodrain, who besides owning the Night Raven is also the director of the play. The actors also get a few breaks in which they adjourn to their dressing rooms to recoup. If the party's means of entry allows them to interview the cast and crew (via a pertinent disguise), they find most of them more than happy to speak to would-be producers or anyone who could further their careers or exposure to the public. Nathaniel Bloodrain, Isadora Shade (Karin), and Rikard Prett are the most likely candidates for these interviews. Bloodrain plays the mysterious vampire thespian to the hilt, and makes eyes at any PCs with exceptional Charisma (regardless of their gender) as he promotes the play that he describes as "poignant and striking, a gripping story of a man who sacrifices everything in a lost cause and the tragic heroine left behind by his senseless death."

Rikard and Isadora respond to interviewers as described above in the Dramatis Personae section of this adventure. Isadora casts *glibness* if she sees the party coming, and meekly avoids the topic of Brengen's obsession with her, playing the shy new ingénue with panache. She instead allows Rikard to bring up the half-orc's harassing behavior and disturbing gifts of dead flowers and letters written in blood. If the party asks to see this evidence of the half-orc's activity, Isadora furnishes them with it, gingerly retrieving the dead flowers and letter from the closet of her dressing room.

Vizmier is reluctant to converse with anyone. His irritation level is extremely high during these grueling rehearsals, especially considering he is preoccupied with dominating Brengen Grenton Leer as well. Janton hides among the rafters and avoids detection by anyone seeking inquiries, but other technicians and stagehands are happy to talk to any PCs about their work. Bartellamus Cartwright comes late to the rehearsals and leaves early with his entourage of sycophantic Curtain Alley Players in tow. There is only a 20% chance he is present when the PCs arrive, and even if he is present, he refuses to give an interview, believing himself to be "above that sort of thing." He departs for the Long Whiskers Inn to enjoy some mulled wine every evening at 9:00 PM while the rest of the cast and crew toil away at his play.

Desriya avoids any and all contact with the party. The nymph has had bad experiences with adventurers in general, and the recent arrival of assassins in her old master's employ has put her particularly on edge. The party should get a good look at the dancer in her veiled form so that she becomes an important suspect (and red herring) later after they manage to squeeze Bartellamus and gain information on his muse, the Dark Lady.

Act Two: The Long Whiskers

Talantier's theater elite have patronized the Long Whiskers since Mistress Hope opened her doors some 120 years ago. Hope is ancient, even by elven standards, and short, barely topping most halflings in height. The shriveled little matron of the Long Whiskers is a barkeep's barkeep, and serving ale and fine spirits has been her family's trade for generations. The tiny elven mistress is gifted with a booming voice that belies her diminutive stature, and she hollers a bold welcome to every patron entering her establishment. She also flirts raunchily with young men of any race, mostly because she loves the reaction it gets out of them.

Hope offers a wide selection of locally brewed ales, as well as an impressive list of elven wines, gnomish sorghum spirit, and halfing honeymead. The menu conspicuously excludes dwarven brews.

The Long Whiskers' upper level contains fully furnished rooms and suites for rent, but at present there are no vacancies. Hope's serving staff consists mostly of extremely handsome elven and half-elven men, and rumors of her unscrupulous hiring practices are widely circulated in Talantier, serving as a constant source of amusement for her clientele. Hope often openly acknowledges that few men "have what it takes to work under her," earning guffaws and "hear hears!" from her patrons. Hope never sees much trouble in her bar thanks to Durinok, a towering half-orc barbarian from the countryside who bounces to pay off a gambling debt Hope purchased from his bookie. On occasion, Hope smirks and whispers to a patron that, "Protecting the establishment isn't the only bouncing Durinok does to pay what he owes."

Scene 1. Meet the Playwright (EL 12)

If the party calls on Bartellamus Cartwright at the Long Whiskers they find him seated at an ale-soaked darkwood table in the deep inner reaches of the inn's smoky common room. He is not alone. No less than six members of the Curtain Alley Players pretend to enjoy his company while enthusiastically consuming the copious amounts of food and ale he buys for them. The players are the truest breed of sycophants to infest Talantier's theater district, and they're dangerous to boot. They don't take kindly to anyone disturbing Bartellamus. Unless the PCs make some effort to mask their investigation of Cartwright (under the pretense of procuring his next masterpiece for their own theater, for example) and couch any probing questions in obsequious praise (or at least idle chitchat), the players quickly take offense. If the party responds indelicately to the players' initially polite hints that they should take their leave, the thespian thugs attempt to incite the party's anger with disparaging remarks running the range of slights to the PC's intelligence, sexual ineptitudes, fashion calamities, and parents.

If the PCs take the bait and proffer violence, the ruffians share a look, silently exchange their comedy masks for the grim tragedy masks hung at their belts, and then leap eagerly into a classic barroom brawl.

The players do not do so unprovoked, not because they are honorable souls, but rather because they know the bar's bouncer too well. Durinok sides with the Players as long as they do not initiate the fray, and Durinok is the sort of half-orc you want on your side in a good old-fashioned tavern dust-up.

Curtain Alley Players (6): hp 42 each; see page 59.

Durinok, Half-orc Barbarian 10: hp 90; *Dungeon Master's Guide* page 112. Durinok does not wield a greataxe, but rather a masterwork sap, so exchange his Improved Critical and Weapon Focus accordingly. **Melee** masterwork sap +16 (1d4+4/19–20).

Tactics: The Players flank PCs in order to sneak attack, and they fight dirty with their Improved Unarmed Strikes ny thumb-jabbing eyes, kicking groins, and getting a good hold on hair in order to slam an offending PC's face into a tabletop or wall. Durinok curses while he works, blustering obscenities as he lays into the PCs with his sap. Durinok was once dominated by a wizard and forced to dance like a courtesan for an entire evening, and therefore beats any obvious spellcasters into a drooling unconscious mess before moving on to other opponents. If the PCs draw steel, the gang responds in kind and the watch is called.

Development: If the characters are victorious, Bartellamus immediately reverts to the sniveling spineless wretch he is. If questioned, he puts up no resistance, sobbing and begging the party not to beat or kill him. He confesses to his plagiary, but denies any involvement in Draelor Vaultrand's death (the truth). He also has only one other manuscript in his possession right now (in his room on the upper level of the Long Whiskers, see below). If hard pressed for more info he reveals the night-time visitations by his special "muse" the Dark Lady, though he has no idea who she is.

Scene 2. Cartwright's Lodgings

Cartwright stays in the finest quarters the Long Whiskers has to offer, a suite on the upper level. Hope is not in the habit of telling strangers anything about her guests, but the PCs might discreetly ask around (DC 15 Gather Information check) to secure Bartellamus's room number. They may also simply shadow the unsuspecting playwright to his room when he retires late in the evening after many tankards of ale and his usual feast of venison, honey-basted sweet potatoes, and quail eggs.

Bartellamus

Sneaking into Cartwright's room is not particularly difficult, and the PCs need only avoid being Spotted by Durinok or Hope as they ascend the stairwell to the upper level. The door to his room is locked (Open Lock DC 20).

Within is a finely furnished apartment with a canopied bed, a fine mahogany writing table, a cedar chest, and a large attached bathing area with a darkwood tub. The chest is unlocked and contains Cartwright's voluminous collection of gaudy silk doublets, leggings, and satin cloaks (the whole lot is worth 120 gp). Pages from Cartwright's latest "original" masterpiece (entitled "A Day of Crimson Twilight") lay strewn about the mahogany desk, as do quills and inkwells. A DC 25 Search check allows the PCs to discover Vaultrand's original (and complete) copy beneath the cedar chest in a leather sleeve.

Act Three: Chasing Shadows

A fair share of misinformation muddles the PCs investigations into Vaultrand's disappearance, potentially sending them chasing after a few suspects innocent of the crime. The two most obvious red herrings in this adventure are Brengen Grenton Leer, Karin's scapegoat and the unfortunate half-orc about to take the rap for killing Taluran Sentecore, and Desriya, a nymph with a shadowy past trying her hardest to go legit with a career in showbiz. More information regarding the results of investigating these two figures is provided here.

Scene 1. Hunting Leer

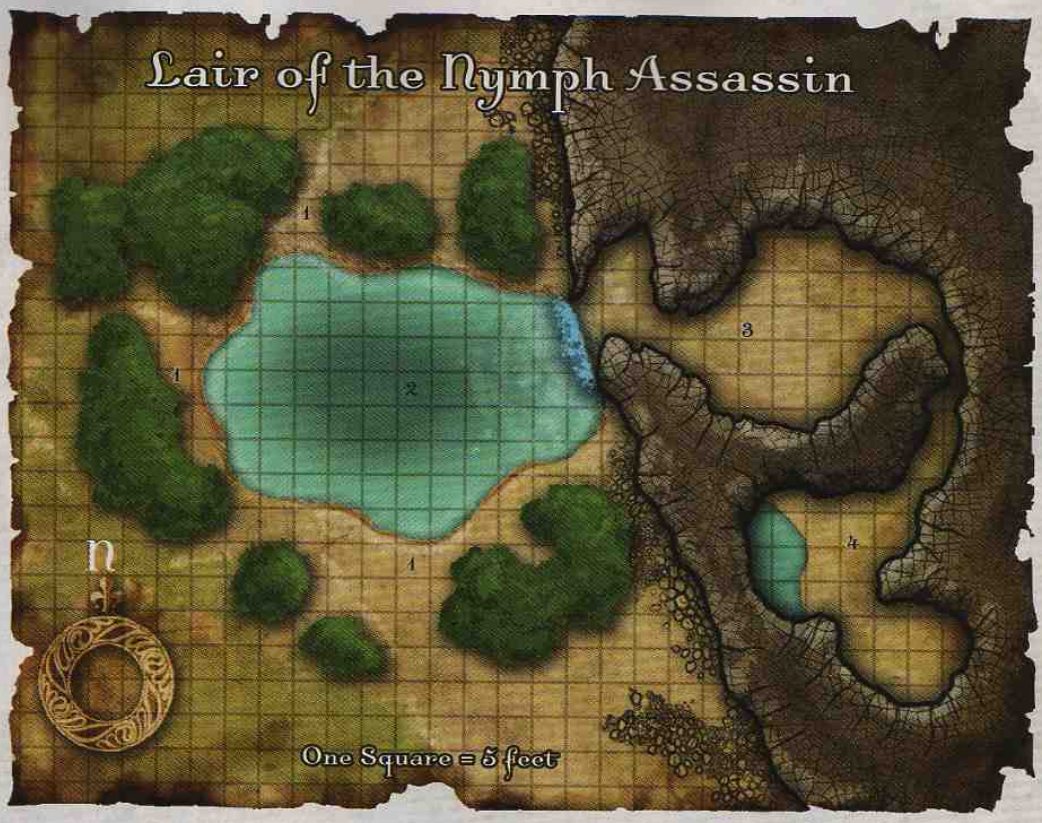
Discovering the dead flowers and disturbing letter sent by Brengen may prompt the PCs to go looking for the deranged half-orc. Leer keeps his quarters at the Stoneshard Guildhall on the Red Rock Ridge in Talantier's Quarry Quarter, where he is currently employed

as a senior mason and work crew foreman. The guild is a close-knit organization with a reputation for taking care of its own. The ranks of the Stoneshard are filled mostly with grim stone-faced men, elves, and dwarves who work hard, avoid trouble, and dislike adventurers interfering in "official guild matters." If the PCs make inquiries, most guildsmen rebuke them gruffly, though a DC 25 Diplomacy check earns them a nod in the direction of the guildmaster's cabin by the Crimson Quarry.

Guildmaster Graigor Ramsen is an emaciated dwarf with leathery skin stretched tight over hard bone. His hollow, joyless eyes regard any intruding PCs with suspicion. Ramsen is an old friend of Brengen Leer, and the two often spent days at a time hunting deer together in the Eastwatch Wood. Ramsen has no intention of doing wrong by his old hunting buddy.

The guildmaster ignores all inquiries, telling the PCs to "mind your own affairs, and leave Leer be." Graigor is aware that Leer has become unhinged and it pains him. He has not seen his friend in over a week, as Brengen has not stayed at the Guild recently. Graigor fears something ill has befallen his muddled hunting partner—or rather, that Leer's unstable behavior has deepened and the half-orc has perpetrated some awful criminal act.

The dwarf assumes the PCs are here to arrest/apprehend/kill Brengen and he tells them nothing. No amount of Diplomacy or Intimidation can persuade the stubborn old dwarf, unless the PCs intimate to Ramsen that they are interested in helping Leer recover his wits. If they manage to convince the guildmaster they are genuinely concerned for Leer's welfare and plan only to get the half-orc the help he needs, Ramsen grudgingly relents and spills what he knows:



"Brengen Leer ain't himself. He sank deep into depression a few weeks ago, and became prone to angry outbursts. Obsessed with some theater harlot he is, and he can't put his mind to nothing else. He had more'n a few fights at the guild, beat Old Jarney Relgin near to death with a shovel, for no reason whatsoever. Recently, his strange behavior took a hard turn. We was out hunting in Eastwatch together, like we done more'n a hundred times afore. This ten-point buck, beautiful animal let me tell ya, comes up over the hillside, with his missus doe following behind. Brengen lets loose with his heavy crossbow, and shoots right at the doe, ignoring the buck like he ain't even there. Not legal that, shooting a female this time o' year. His hands was shaking real bad too. He missed her, and let me tell you, I ain't never seen Brengen miss something he was aiming at. She run off, and Brengen starts off like a mad man chasing her through the wood. When I found him he was firing quarrels into the poor animal's dead carcass over and over again. That was the last time I laid eyes on Brengen Leer."

The above reveals a couple of important clues concerning Leer's dominated condition. One is his shaking, his attempt to resist the spell controlling him because he did not wish to brutally slay the female deer, that compounded with his poor aim, may set a canny PC to thinking. A DC 30 Knowledge (arcana) check allows a character to realize the above symptoms sound curiously like someone acting under an enchantment spell such as *dominate person*.

If the PCs ask about Brengen's quarters, the dwarf lets them in the guildhall and unlocks the half-orc's room for them (as long he still believes they are trying to locate and help his friend). Brengen's room stinks of decaying food and the contents of his waste bucket have not been emptied in weeks. Against one wall of the room is a disturbing "shrine" the half-orc has erected in Isadora's honor. Programs of her last few shows, along with the most recent poster advertising "Swords of Dragonslake," are surrounded by a few of Karin's personal items (passed to the half-orc by Vizmier): a jade comb, the matching earring to the one Karin wears, a lock of her hair, and a pair of white silk gloves. If these items are brought to Isadora, she shudders and

then verifies that they have gone missing from her dressing room in the past week or so.

As the culmination of her plans grows near, Karin has taken to confining Brengen to Ye Olde Shadowplay Theater, so he does not return to his home during this adventure.

Scene 2. Lair of the Nymph Assassin

At some point in the adventure the PCs may bark up Desriya's tree. Hearing rumors about her dark past, connecting her with Bartellamus' "Dark Lady," or buying into Rikard Prett's false accusations may send the party after this dangerous nymph. If the party attempts to confront Desriya in the Night Raven, she does her best to ignore them. If they become violent she threatens to call the Talantier Guard, and defends herself if needed. If the party decides to trail her to her grove they may do so as long as they avoid discovery (either by defeating Desriya's Spot and Listen checks as they follow, or through remote viewing of some kind).

1. The Waterfall Exterior (EL 8)

A large pool of deep green water lies below a rock ridge from which a waterfall cascades into the pool's edge. Hundreds of exotic flowers grow along the edge of the pool, and lily pads dot its surface.

A DC 20 Knowledge (nature) check identifies the flowers as the orchids found in Desriya's dressing room.

Creature: The exterior of Desriya's grove is watched over by a towering gray render, who has bonded itself to the nymph and now protects her redoubt from any unwanted trespassers. The render is always nearby and usually notes the approach of any intruders, arriving on the scene three rounds after the party reaches the grove. The render makes its presence known immediately and attempts to frighten off encroachers with a suitable display of its prodigious strength (such as uprooting a sizeable pine tree and snapping it in two). It makes no move to attack unless the PCs do so or try to enter the pool, but fights viciously until slain once battle is joined.

Gray Render: hp 125; *Monster Manual* 138.

2. The Pool (EL 5)

The pool is 30 feet deep, and its mossy bottom is the resting place of one of the assassins who came to collect Desriya for the Shadowmaster. Desriya fed the corpses of the others to her pet dire tigress and the gray render, but one of the assassins fell into the pool after

having his throat crushed by a swift kick from Desriya. His chainmail dragged his dying body to the floor of the pool, and the nymph didn't bother to retrieve him.

Creatures: The pool is also home to a beautifully speckled anaconda that Desriya befriended recently. The creature attacks anyone besides Desriya who enters the pool.

Anaconda: hp 63; *Monster Manual* 280 (giant constrictor snake).

Treasure: The badly decayed body of the assassin wears a +3 *chainmail* and *boots of elvenkind*. A *scabbard of keen edges* is belted at its waist along with a pouch containing 10 blood rubies (each worth 50 gp). Nearby rests the assassin's +1 *wounding cold iron shortsword*.

3. Beyond the Waterfall (EL 12)

The waterfall cascades with considerable force, and anyone attempting to pass through it must succeed on a DC 25 Swim check or grip the edge of the rocky ridge and succeed on a DC 25 Climb check to avoid being pummeled by the falling wall of water. Those who fail take 2d6 nonlethal damage and are pushed back into the pool.

Behind the cascading wall of water lies a damp mossy cave filled with a variety of fungi, its walls encrusted with lichens and crisscrossed with a mesh of vines.

Creatures: This cave is home to a menagerie of Desriya's pets. The vines anchored in the walls of the cave directly behind the waterfall are assassin vines, and two large mounds of assorted plant life found further in the cave are a pair of shambling mounds. The cave is also the den of a clutch of shocker lizards.

Assassin Vines (4): hp 30 each; *Monster Manual* 20.

Shambling Mounds (2): hp 60 each; *Monster Manual* 222.

Shocker Lizards (6): hp 13 each; *Monster Manual* 224.

Tactics: The assassin vines immediately animate the lichens and vines with their entangle ability, then attack anyone in reach. The shambling mounds advance on PCs battling the vines and attempt to constrict them to death. Meanwhile the shocker lizards dart about excitedly, pulsing out their electrical discharges both to bolster the shambling mounds and damage the intruders. If the mounds are destroyed the little lizards flee into niches along the cave walls to avoid the PCs, but continue to pulse out their discharge frantically in hopes of repulsing them.

4. Desriya's Grotto (EL 16)

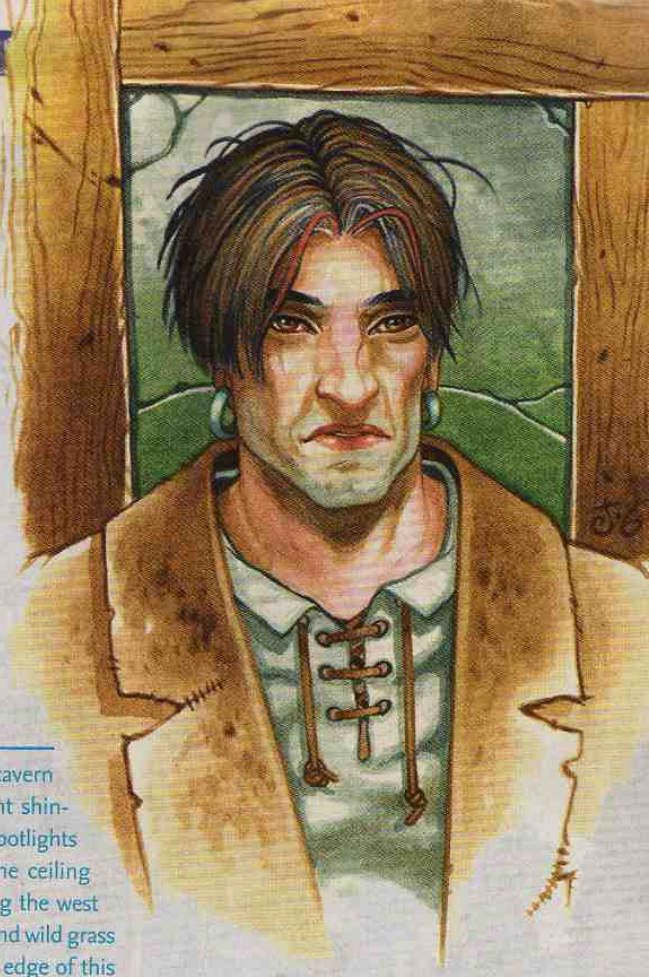
Past the waterfall cave lies a cavern lit by golden beams of sunlight shining down like the sun's own spotlights through dozens of shafts in the ceiling above. A natural pond lies along the west wall, and a bed of fresh flowers and wild grass is bunched up on the southern edge of this chamber.

Creatures: Desriya and her pet dire tigress call this chamber home. The dire tigress usually lounges in a large shaft of sunlight by the lake but is no doubt alerted by the sounds of battle from area **3**, and now lurks in the shadows on the north end of this cavern. Desriya awaits intruders in the shadows just outside of a shaft of sunlight to challenge them. She assumes the intruders are more assassins or mercenaries in the employ of the Shadowmaster.

Desriya, female nymph assassin 8: hp 72; see page 55.

Dire Tigress: hp 120; *Monster Manual* 65.

Tactics: As soon as she is alerted to the presence of enemies in her grove, Desriya casts *barkskin, fox's cunning, bear's endurance, cat's grace, longstrider, air walk, freedom of movement, protection from energy*, and *invisibility*. She is furious about the slaughter of her pets, but attempts to parley with the party anyway. If the PCs do not rush to attack outright, they may learn that Desriya had nothing to do with Draelor Vaultrand's disappearance. The nymph assails them with questions



Garrin

first: "Why are you here!?" "Who sent you?" and the like. She prepares a death attack as she converses with them from the shadows. If Desriya is assured the party has nothing to do with her less-than-savory past, she is willing to answer their queries.

If the party displeases the nymph or threatens her with violence, Desriya drops her *invisibility* and steps into the shaft of sunlight, exposing the party to her blinding beauty plainly visible through the sheer gown of gossamer draped about her. Desriya then death attacks her target with a thrown dart, and slips into the shadows via hide in plain sight. The moment she attacks, her dire tigress leaps into the fray, mauling the closest PC.

On the second round of combat the nymph casts *greater invisibility* on herself. Desriya then strikes from the shadows, punishing the PCs with Stunning Fists to render them easy targets for her sneak attacks before melting back into the darkness. Desriya uses Combat Exper-

Flick of the Wrist

If Garrin draws a light weapon and makes a melee attack with it in the same round, he catches his opponent flat-footed (for the purpose of this attack only). He may use this feat only once per round and once per opponent during any single combat encounter.

Moving Things Along

Since this is an open-ended, mystery-style adventure, it is fairly likely that the PCs will get lost or sidetracked at some point. Although the most likely red herrings are fully detailed, this is a complex web of deception and trickery, so don't be surprised if the players go charging off in the wrong direction altogether. Furthermore, although there are enough clues provided for the PCs to figure everything out on their own, only the most dedicated and skilled groups will be able to piece together the whole story in time to prevent the tragedy at the Night Raven.

You should encourage the PCs to use any divination magic they possess to help them untangle the mystery. The answers you give them can either speed up or slow down the pace of the investigation, depending on how they are doing. If they seem to be racing through the adventure, you can point them in the direction of the red herrings. On the other hand, if they are getting confused, use divination to point them toward Isadora, Janton, and Ye Olde Shadowplay Theater.

Even if the PCs get hopelessly lost, try to make sure they are in the Night Raven for the opening performance of "Swords of Dragonslake." If nothing else, Taluran Sentecore can hire them as additional bodyguards when he learns of Vaultrand's dissapearance.

tise to full effect unless she finds herself unable to strike her foes. If hard pressed or badly injured, the nymph uses *dimension door* to escape outside (taking her tigress with her if possible) and fleeing into the surrounding wilderness. If Desriya has any reason to believe the PCs are good, but is forced to fight, she uses non-lethal unarmed attacks and forgoes death attacks for stunning attacks instead.

Scene 3. Vaultrand's Misguided Revenge (EL 16)

Karin is as wily as they come, and keeps well informed. By now, the dark murderess has no doubt learned of the party's investigation and decides to stop them before they get too close. She is aware that Draelor had a brother, a duelist with a fiery temper and exceptional skill at arms named Garrin, who arrived in Talantier to inquire into his brother's disappearance. Karin has Vizmier create illusionary doubles of the PCs and send them about town to brag how they "did in the little dramatist." This brings Garrin knocking on the PCs' door looking for a little payback.

Garrin is an artist in his own right, wielding his rapier with a skill to rival his brother's puissance with words. Possessed of a vagabond heart and a temper as lightning quick as his sword, Garrin left Talantier many years ago to seek his fortune as a famous duelist. He loved his brother, but a slight to his honor angers him even more than the death of his kin. He intends to find those foolish enough to besmirch his family name and challenge them to a duel to the death.

Garrin's face is sharp featured and his eyes are multihued like a snake's. This is a side effect of a potent snake's blood liqueur he has taken a liking to on his wide-ranging travels.

GARRIN VAULTRAND **CR 15**

Male human rogue 7/fighter 2/duelist 6
CN Medium humanoid
Init +12; **Senses** Listen +12, Spot +13
Languages Common, Draconic, Elven, Giant, Goblin

AC 22, touch 20, flat-footed 12; Dodge, Mobility, enhanced mobility, uncanny dodge
hp 88 (15 HD)
Fort +10, **Ref** +20, **Will** +7; evasion

Spd 30 ft.
Melee +2 *keen icy burst rapier* +21/+16/+11 (1d6+4/15–20 plus 1d6 cold) or +1 *dagger* +20/+15/+10 (1d4+3/19–20)
Ranged +1 *dagger* +20/+15/+10 (1d4+3/19–20)
Base Atk +13; **Grp** +15
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Flick of the Wrist, Improved Feint, Quick Draw, acrobatic charge, precise strike +1d6, sneak attack +4d6
Combat Gear *potion of cure serious wounds, potion of invisibility, potion of remove fear*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 22, Con 12, Int 18, Wis 8, Cha 11

SQ improved reaction +2, trapfinding, trap sense +2

Feats Combat Expertise, Dodge, Flick of the Wrist, Improved Feint, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Mobility, Quick Draw, Weapon Finesse

Skills Balance +22, Bluff +16, Climb +19, Escape Artist +22, Gather Information +8, Hide +16, Intimidate +12, Jump +21, Knowledge (local) +13, Listen +12, Move Silently +16, Perform (dance) +9, Sleight of Hand +18, Spot +13, Tumble +24

Possessions combat gear, *Icy Hand of Death* (*+2 keen icy burst rapier*), *+1 dagger, amulet of natural armor +2, gloves of Dexterity +4, cloak of resistance +2*, white silken handkerchief with tiny diamonds sewn along the hem (600 gp), fine black leather vest with silver trim (10 gp), black dragonhide boots inlaid with silver (1,200 gp), ring carved in the likeness of a mermaid studded with tiny sapphires and emeralds (500 gp).

Tactics: Garrin ambushes the PCs, opening the fray with a Flick of the Wrist and sending his *+1 dagger* into a foe. He then uses Combat Expertise to full effect and Improved Feint in order to sneak attack, allocating his Dodge bonus against the most obvious fighter of the group. His body twists and contorts in unthinkable ways as he darts about his foes, striking with the speed of a cobra. His white fox-fur-trimmed *cloak of resistance* whirls about him as he dances his dance of death gracefully, a silken handkerchief held lightly in his off hand.

Development: If the PCs are able to subdue Garrin alive and clear their names as far as he is concerned, he may even join them and aid them against Karin and Janton. Besides the possessions listed above, Garrin has the last letter he received from Draelor, which describes his relationship with Isadora Shade, including poetic and detailed accounts of his passionate encounters with the young ingénue, and the story of how he tailed the mysterious woman to the burned out remnants of Ye Olde Shadowplay Theater. Garrin intended to investigate the theater but heard about the PCs before he had the chance.

Handout 1

Draxon,
The fools refused to sell. They didn't even look at the gold, just turned me down. I don't know what they see in this crummy part of town anyway, you'd think they'd be smart enough to get out when I gave them the chance. Well, they'll regret crossing me. Do it tonight, make sure there's nothing left of Ye Olde Shadowplay but dust and ashes. But be careful, be sure not to harm the Oshras themselves, I don't want any deaths on my conscience.

DON'T GET CAUGHT!
TS

Act Four: Ye Olde Shadowplay

As the plot thickens, the PCs investigations take them down a darkened lane of Curtain Quarter theater folk don't often travel. This dismal little side street off of Curtain Alley is home to sagging wooden bunkhouses that once housed the city's impoverished migrant workers and their families, an abandoned asylum and orphanage, and the burned-out carcass of Ye Olde Shadowplay. The theater's exterior is charred and twisted, its wooden beams and planks warped and blackened by the fire's caress. It is a mangled, mournful thing, filled with inky darkness impenetrable to the human eye. PCs formerly impressed by the gothic design of the Night Raven are suddenly aware of a chill creeping up their spine as they take in Ye Olde Shadowplay's grisly remains. The Night Raven is the façade of nightmarish darkness, while the gutted husk before them is the real deal.

Scene 1. Traces of Death

Draxon Yurvos, hearing rumors of the renewed activity around the Ye Olde Shadowplay, entered the ruin to investigate a few days ago. Once inside the front doors, he barely had a chance to look around before the Hunters in Darkness (see below) pounced on him from the rafters and tore him limb from limb. Unwilling to put up with the smell of the decaying remains, Karin dumped his body in a pile of garbage near the theater entrance. When the PCs approach, a DC 20 Spot check is sufficient to notice the remains of a human torso still wearing a torn knapsack buried in a pile of refuse. A search of the corpse turns up a faded envelope with a thirteen-year-old postmark. Inside is a letter addressed to Draxon. It contains instructions from Taluran Sentecore regarding the destruction of Ye Olde Shadowplay Theater (see Handout 1, above).

Scene 2. Shadow Puppets

The theater's grand marquee has collapsed in front of the house doors, a pile of blackened timber blocking the entrance into Shadowplay's lightless interior. The shadows around the theater seem to dance of their own volition.

Ye Olde Shadowplay's connection to the Plane of Shadow is strong, and in some places nearly coterminous. For that reason sources of light other than natural fire (from a torch or lantern) cast only a ghoulish green-gray glow.

If the PCs have called any attention to themselves whatsoever in their investigations thus far (by roughhousing Bartellamus, by appearing suspiciously at the Night Raven to question cast members, and so on), Karin is aware of their approach and Janton awaits them in the rafters above the stage and house seating area.

1. The Lobby

Once decorated with ornate murals of scenes from the Shadow Company's most requested plays, this atrium chamber is now filled with nothing but soot and the ashy remains of a ticket desk and chairs.

The wind whistles strangely through this area; seeming to sing a haunting melody amongs the blackened rafters. Doors leading to the audience seating area and stage lie along the north wall.

A DC 25 Listen check identifies the melody as the lullaby played by the carved elephant that once belonged to Delia (see Isadora's dressing room in Act One).

2. House

The audience area is nothing in comparison to the plush stadium-style seating of the Night Raven, just the charred remnants of simple wooden benches. The entire house and stage area is near collapse.

Shortly after the PCs enter, several rafters give way with a groaning clamor of breaking wood. This is no accident, as Janton Wirespindle releases the support cables on this section of rafters, sending them tumbling down on PCs' heads, inflicting 4d6 bludgeoning damage (Reflex DC 20 for half). If a PC bothers to inspect the rafters, a DC 30 Search check allows them to note deep grooves where steel support cables obviously held them in place, indicating that their timely fall was no accident.

3. Dancing Shadows (EL 14)

The charred stage is covered with several inches of black soot. Beyond the front boards stand a dozen wooden mannequins, each blackened and twisted by the flames, their limbs contorted into tortuous poses giving the impression of a macabre dance. Center stage a set of wind chimes hangs from a cable. Further upstage stand several screens of crimson-hued cloth stretched taut within bamboo frames. The flickering flames of torchlight dance behind each screen, casting several shadows in the shape of humanoids and other stranger creatures on their surface. Above, large black velvet curtains hang from the fly rail and rafters.

The shadows on the screens are cast by several large puppets crafted by Janton (marked with a "p" on the map). Most are humanoid in shape but with horns, tails, four limbs, or other oddities. One casts a shadow bearing a remarkable resemblance to a manticore. The diabolical gnome has rigged the puppets with cables and repeating crossbows. The cables extend up to the fly rail above, where a complex pulley system allows someone to puppeteer the movements and actions of the puppets.

As soon as any PC draws close to the stage, Janton begins his deadly performance. Activating the pulleys from the fly rail, the gnome first sets the blackened mannequins downstage into a dance and causing the wind chimes, one of which is actually a *chime of interruption*, to ring out. On this same round the puppets behind the screen begin to dance, sway, and canvas the area in crossbow bolts. From in front of the shadow screens, a DC 30 Spot check is required to realize that the puppets are not live foes and discern they are moving on some sort of set pattern. For the next five rounds (until the crossbows are all empty) each PC in range is targeted by 1d4 attacks from the crossbows (Ranged +10, 1d8/19–20). The party may destroy the puppets, but targeting them from in front of the shadow screens results in a 20% miss chance as the shadows obscure the actual location of the puppets. There are eight puppets besides the manticore (marked with an "m" on the map). Reducing the number of puppets subtracts one from the number of attacks made each round per every two puppets disabled.

On the succeeding rounds, Janton takes direct control of the manticore and uses two of the five masterwork repeating crossbows mounted on its tail to attack the party (both are loaded with +2 *bolts*). Each round Janton uses the manticore to attack, he must make a DC 20 Perform (puppetry) check, otherwise he suffers a –4 penalty on his attack rolls with the crossbows.

Puppets (12): Hardness 2; hp 10; Break DC 12.

Manticore Puppet: Hardness 5; hp 40; Break DC 22.

Creatures: Concealed within the curtains above the stage are six cloakers who took up residence in Karin and Janton's long absence. The aberrations have allied themselves with the scarred gnome and his dark mistress. If the party attempts to ascend to the fly rail from the stage (either by climbing cables or using the access ladders on the northeast and southeast corners of the stage) the cloakers immediately attack.

Cloakers (6): hp 45 each; *Monster Manual* 36.

Trap: Besides the collection of deadly puppets, Janton has also rigged several heavy sandbags hanging from the fly rail to release and fall on anyone who steps across tripwires set in the squares marked with an "s" on the map. The sandbags are filled with heavy stones and deal 6d6 damage to anyone struck.

Sandbag Traps (8): CR 5; mechanical; touch trigger; Atk +15 melee (6d6 damage); Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 25.

4. Fly Rail (EL 10)

As soon as any PC attempts to ascend into the darkness above the stage, Janton flees the scene via his *cape of the mountebank* and hurries back to the Night Raven, where the PCs encounter him later. The fly rail itself consists of four separate rails with thin, badly damaged catwalks between them. Rail One controls the mannequins and wind chimes and has the sandbag traps hooked up to it. Rails Two and Three control 6 puppets each, and Rail Four controls the manticore. Each rail's pulley system can be deactivated with a DC 25 Disable Device. Each time a rail is damaged by an attack there is a cumulative 10% chance the catwalk tears loose of its moorings.

Rails (4): Hardness 5; hp 20; Break DC 20; Disable Device DC 25

Creatures: Loyal denizens of the Plane of Shadow known as the Hunters in the Darkness have pledged their allegiance to Karin in honor of her family's affin-

ity for their native plane's essence and her own expertise as a shadowdancer. These shadow beasts are dark furred and feline in appearance. They are bipedal with four powerful arms, their hands ending in cruel claws. The Hunters await the PCs in the shadowy heights surrounding the fly rail and attack them the moment they reach this area.

Hunters in the Darkness (4) **CR 7**
Male Shadow Beast (ghirrash)
CE Large outsider (extraplanar)
Miniatures Handbook 68
Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., Listen +11, Spot +11
Languages Abyssal, Common, Infernal

AC 20, touch 12, flat-footed 17; displacement (50% miss chance)
hp 52 (7 HD) **DR** 5/magic
Resists acid 10, cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 14
Immune poison
Fort +8, **Ref** +8, **Will** +6

Spd 50 ft.
Melee 4 claws +13 (1d6+6) and bite +7 (1d4+3 plus paralysis)
Base Atk +7; **Grp** +17
Atk Options paralysis (DC 16, 1d4+1 rounds, elves immune), pounce, rake +13 (1d6+3)

Abilities Str 23, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 15
Feats Improved Initiative, Track, Weapon Focus (claw)
Skills Balance +15, Climb +16, Hide +13, Jump +26, Listen +11, Move Silently +13, Spot +11, Survival +11, Tumble +15

5. Substage (EL 11)

his cramped substage has a stone floor covered with soot. The burned-out remains of several shadow screens rest against one wall, while burned-out chests line the opposite wall.

The entire floor in this area is covered with the same red ash found on Isadora's boots in her dressing room (see Act One).

The only object of note here is a slightly scorched portrait-style painting depicting the Oshira family. The entire family is depicted here, and any PC making a DC 10 Intelligence check immediately notices a striking resemblance between the young Karin in the portrait and Isadora Shade. Karin knows she should have destroyed this painting, as it is the only evidence linking her to Ye Olde Shadowplay, but she could not bring herself to do it.

Creatures: The spirits of Karin's family do not rest easy, and their pain has infused the shadowstuff of this chamber. The writhing shadows around the PCs form into murky images of Talentos and Daralla and attack the PCs In addition Draelor Vaultrand, now a shadow spawn of the Oshiras, haunts this area as well and attacks the party at their command.

Greater Shadows (3): hp 60 each; *Monster Manual* page 221.

Treasure: Folded neatly in one corner is the black shroud Karin wears in her guise as the Dark Lady.

A DC 25 Search check reveals Draelor Vaultrand's body in a false wall on the north side of the substage. Dumped on top of his corpse are twelve leather scroll cases, each containing one of his unpublished masterpieces. Each manuscript is worth 1,000 gp.

Development: If the PCs arrive here before noon on the second day (the opening night of "Swords of Dragonslake"), they find Brengen Leer curled up in terror in the back corner of the room, still under the effect of Vizmier's *dominate person*. At noon, Karin collects him and smuggles him into the Night Raven to play his part in her plot that evening.

Act Five: Swords of Dragonslake

Talantier's viewing elite sits in darkness, waiting with baited breath for the curtain to rise and the magic to begin. One way or another, "Swords of Dragonslake" is about to reach its climax.

Scene 1. Karin's Plan (EL 17)

At a climactic moment in the play Karin proceeds downstage, placing herself directly in front of Taluran Sentecore as she sings a powerful ballad of her family's death by dragonfire twenty years ago, dancing as she does so. Janton, meanwhile, has positioned himself on the fly rail grid with a clear shot at Taluran, and quaffed his *potion of enlarge person*, hefting Brengen's heavy crossbow (its bolt laced with deathblade). Poor Brengen stands drooling beside him, still dominated by Vizmier, who is backstage. Karin uses her Disguise Spell feat to cast *cat's grace* and *heroism* on herself and then *hold person* on Taluran, while Vizmier casts *see invisibility, spider climb, displacement,* and *haste*.

Janton then fires directly past Karin into Taluran Sentecore's heart. Chaos ensues,

All in the Timing

The adventure begins on the first night of "hell week" leading up to the Swords of Dragonslake premiere. Hell week is a time-honored tradition of the theater, in which the many final touches to be added to ensure the success of the play are put off until the last two days before opening. The debut of "Swords" is the final act of this adventure in which Karin Oshira enacts her revenge on Taluran Sentecore. The PCs have two days to unravel the mystery, and ideally show up at the premiere just minutes or even seconds before Karin and Janton slay the Speaker.

If the players unravel the mystery faster than expected you may wish to reward them for their actions by allowing them to avert Act V of this adventure before it even begins. On the other hand, here are a couple of ways to slow them down on their return to the Night Raven in order to ensure a heart-pounding climax to the adventure:

1. Due to Vizmier's illusionary antics, the Town Guard may take the PCs into custody for questioning, delaying their arrival at the Night Raven on opening night. If the PCs are able to convince the guardsmen of Karin's devious plan by presenting evidence or succeeding at a DC 30 Diplomacy check, the party may even enlist their aid in Act V.
2. If the PCs trounced (or killed) any Curtain Alley Players earlier in the adventure, they may get jumped by a band of ten of the thugs on their way back to the Night Raven.

Isadora Shade screams in dismay and takes cover. Vizmier forces Brengen to "make a run for it," making sure the half-orc is spotted by the PCs and much of the audience.

Janton Wirespindle: hp 81; see page 54.

Karin Oshira: hp 63; see page 53.

Vizmier Rathor: hp 58; see page 54.

Tactics: What actually happens at the theater depends on how much the PCs know. If they have unraveled the mystery they may even prevent Janton from firing the shot and save Brengen's life. Make opposed Spot and Hide checks to see if the PCs notice the gnome and half-orc in the rafters (the bright lights of the stage and darkness above give both a +5 on their Hide check). In the event that Janton is prevented from firing, or if Brengen is stopped from reaching the catwalk by PCs watching the theater, then the crafty gnome employs his backup plan: He releases the rigging holding a large chandelier in place above the front audience section by firing a crossbow bolt at a quick release he arranged beforehand. The chandelier plummets and the audience panics. The PCs have one round to do something.

A DC 20 Strength check made by anyone on the catwalk above allows them to grip the cables and stop the chandelier's descent, but they must then either remain in place holding it for two rounds (making a tempting target for Janton) while the audience flees, or make a DC 25 Strength check to haul it back up and re-lock it to the rail. The chandelier weighs 500 pounds.

If both plans fail Karin draws her +3 *shortsword* and runs Taluran through herself, then casts *displacement* on herself and tries to escape. In this event, if Janton is not incapacitated, he activates their escape diversion by firing a +1 *flaming bolt* into the huge red dragon puppet hanging above the stage that contains a large amount of alchemists' fire. The writhing flames instantly spread to the ceiling and the curtains of the stage.

Janton attempts flight unless Karin is in danger. If so, he draws attackers to him by punishing them with hails of crossbow bolts. Vizmier also jumps to Karin's aid, deluging the PCs with offensive spells after casting *greater invisibility* on himself.

Karin summons her shadow ally (the tormented spirit of her younger sister Delia) to fight for her as well, and uses Ironskin Chant to safeguard herself from harm. She attempts to shadow jump to freedom if reduced to less than 20 hp. Janton fights to the death to defend her, but flees once Karin is safely away.

Concluding the Adventure

"Swords of Dragonslake" affords several opportunities for further adventure. Any NPCs who tangled with the PCs and got away may return to trouble them. In addition, if the PCs befriended Desriya, they may be drawn into protecting her from her old friends in the Shadowmaster's organization.

Finally the PCs have strutted the boards, at least in some sense, by becoming part of the "Swords of Dragonslake" spectacle and ensuing scandal. If they saved Taluran's life and impressed the viewing elite of Talantier with their "performance," members of the party may even be up for a Greensburrow Drama Award at the end of the theater season. If Karin or Janton survived, they no doubt plan some act of horrific revenge to take place during the ceremonies. If the PCs survive the frenzied attentions of fans and foes, a whirlwind stage career may lie ahead, bringing all sorts of unplanned bedlam into the PCs' lives.

Nicolas Logue is once again a monk 5/thespian 6/freelance writer 7 based on the island of Oahu. As a life-long creature of the theater, this adventure holds a special place in Nick's heart. He would like to dedicate it to the wonderful woman who has taught him more about life, theater, and love than he could ever discover himself, the lovely Taurie Kinoshita, the femme fatale of Nicolas' life and his eternal joy. Thank you for everything, my love.

Mt.Zogon
HOW WAS YOUR DATE WITH THAT HALF-OGRE FELLOW?
I KILLED HIS PARENTS!
I WENT TO MEET GOKK AT HIS CAVE, AND HIS PARENTS WERE THERE, AND THEY STARTED GRILLING ME WITH PERSONAL QUESTIONS!
"WHICH GOD DO YOU WORSHIP? DO YOU LIKE CHILDREN? DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN?" ...I SNAPPED!!
LUCKILY, THOUGH, THE REST OF THE DATE WENT PRETTY WELL!
BY TONY MOSELEY
ZOGONIA.COM

Vlindarian's Vault

BY JOHNATHAN M. RICHARDS
BY UDON WITH MIKE FRANCHINA
BY ROB LAZZARETTI
ANY SETTING | HIGH LEVEL (13TH–20TH) | DUNGEON CRAWL

In a megalith floating on the Elemental Plane of Fire, a beholder cult holds a kidnapped dragon hostage in a vault full of magical wonders. Now it's up to the PCs to bring her out safely.

"Vlindarian's Vault" is a D&D adventure suitable for four 18th-level PCs. While it uses material from *Lords of Madness* and *Faiths and Pantheons*, these books are not required to run this adventure.

Adventure Background

Vlindarian is the leader of a half-dozen beholders, the remains of a hive all but destroyed by an enemy hive in the beholders' interminable xenophobic wars.

Vlindarian is somewhat unusual for a beholder, having followed an instinctive knack for magic to become a beholder mage. Furthermore, it does not share the typical beholder view that humanoids are nothing more than sentient cattle; in fact, Vlindarian also started a beholder cult, led by an outcast elf named Tiatyllin, that is composed primarily of slaadi disguised as humans and now devoted to the beholder deity, the Great Mother. These cultists, recruited during Vlindarian's banishment to Limbo after the fall of its hive, provide the beholder with a small army of assistants in its business endeavors.

Vlindarian schemes just as much as a typical beholder, but its schemes lean more toward practicality. Realizing that adventurers are a ready source of the magic items beholders love gazing upon (an act that powers their magical eye rays), Vlindarian set up a business venture guaranteed to provide it with all the magic items it would ever need: a secure storage location where adventurers can stash their equipment when not in use. A cross between a bank and a public storage facility, Vlindarian's Vault has done remarkably well in the months since its opening.

Realizing that most people are uncomfortable dealing with beholders, Vlindarian uses its disguised cultists to maintain the storefront, preferring to spend its time floating through the vault proper. Recently, Vlindarian expanded the scope of the Vault's mission, accepting a request to store an abducted dragon for a hefty price. The Vault also contains the occasional vagabond or drifter as fodder for the beholders.

Adventure Synopsis

A silver dragon in human form approaches the PCs, asking for their help in retrieving his kidnapped mate.

The PCs must infiltrate the beholder-guarded Vault in order to rescue the other dragon.

Adventure Hooks

The adventure begins when the PCs are approached by a young man introducing himself as Glistern. He seeks a band of adventurers to infiltrate Vlindarian's Vault, a secure storage facility where his mate Sumerthain is being held. Alternately, PCs might be required to infiltrate the vault to recover a powerful artifact "retained" by the beholders when its owner died without a chance to bequeath it, or simply be informed of the situation and intent on ridding the city of a beholder menace—while picking up some handsome items for themselves.

Glistern's Story

Glistern is a young adult silver dragon whose lair was recently attacked by a well-armed band of adventurers who overcame his defenses and made off with much of his treasure, as well as his incapacitated mate Sumerthain. Glistern tracked the band and determined that they deposited their ill-gained loot in Vlindarian's Vault before departing for adventures elsewhere.

Glistern knows little about the Vault, save its location in the city. He assumes the Vault itself is located deep below the office headquarters somewhere, but has been reluctant to penetrate the building's interior beyond the reception area, presuming that any vault capable of holding his mate is probably beyond his current abilities. He has, however, devised a plan allowing a stealthy band of adventurers to infiltrate the Vault's interior, where they could search for Sumerthain. By stretching a *portable hole* over a tower shield and covering it with a removable plate, he believes he could conceal the PCs inside the *portable hole*, then pay to have the tower shield stored inside the Vault. At the appropriate time, the PCs could exit the shield and search the Vault interior, dealing with whatever internal security might be present. To survive inside the *portable hole*, he can also provide up to four *bottles of air*.

While he's rather proud of the plan, Glistern happily agrees to any other strategies the PCs may put forth.

The dragon eagerly provides a description of Sumerthain's human form, but unless he is absolutely convinced of the PCs' trustworthiness (a high-level paladin or cleric of a good deity goes a long way toward assuaging Glistern's fears), he refrains from explaining his and Sumerthain's true natures. As payment, he offers 50,000 gp to the party as a whole, payable upon his mate's return.

What Glistern doesn't realize is that Sumerthain is under the effects of a *feeblemind* spell cast by those who overpowered her in her lair, so she'll be in no shape to help her rescuers until that spell has been removed.

Glistern, Young Adult Silver Dragon: hp 202; *Monster Manual* 87.

The Office

The office area of Vlindarian's Vault is in the business district of the city, within walking distance from several inns, armorers, weaponsmiths, and a magic shop. Vlindarian's cult has managed to create a persona for the beholder with a reputation as an honest, if eccentric, human businesswoman who rarely visits her own establishment.

The single-story office building is constructed of stone, with a ceiling height of 10 feet. The office interiors are lit with *continual flame* spells on decorative sconces along the walls.

01. Main Door

The main entrance to this one-story stone building is an imposing metal door, upon which is painted an image of a sea chest wrapped in locks and chains, along with the legend, "Vlindarian's Vault—Secure Storage Guaranteed."

Iron Door: 2 inches thick; hardness 10; 60 hp; Break DC 28 (DC 38 when *arcane locked* after business hours).

02. Reception Area (EL 16)

Comfortable benches line both sides of the room, with a desk directly in front of the main door.

One of the beholder cultists mans this desk at all times, greeting customers warmly before directing them back to the manager's office, where Tiatyllin (see area **05** below) answers questions and conducts business.

O3. Examination Room

This workroom contains a long table against one wall, with two sets of double doors besides the door leading to the reception area. The double doors are large enough to allow a standard-sized wagon to be brought in from the alley outside.

This room is where any valuables brought in to Vlindarian for storage are examined and inventoried before being brought to the Vault itself. Typically, the goods are carted in from outside, laid out on the table, and thoroughly examined by one or more of the cult members. Two permanent *unseen servants* occupy this room; they can be commanded to sort coins into stacks of ten by monetary value to make counting easier and quicker. Tiatyllin prepares two copies of a written inventory of all items, which are signed for by the owner. Once a storage fee has been decided upon, this is signed for as well. The goods are then taken by cult members deeper inside the office area, for transport to the Vault. Customers are not allowed beyond the double doors leading to area **O4**.

If the PCs are using Glistern's tower shield gambit to sneak into the Vault, Tiatyllin summons one of the beholder cult elders, a slaad named Chonas, to courier the shield to the Vault.

The outer doors are iron and are normally barred from the inside. Vlindarian also uses an *arcane lock* spell on them after normal business hours.

Iron Door: 2 inches thick; hardness 10; 60 hp; Break DC 28.

O4. Inner Hallway (EL 10)

This passageway is for the transport of goods to the teleportation chamber in area **O7** and also leads to the living quarters of the beholder cult members. A gray slaad cultist is stationed here at all times.

Gray Slaad: hp 95; *Monster Manual* 231.

O5. Manager's Office (EL 18)

Elaborate carvings hang on the walls of this wood-paneled office, and several marble busts stand at various points around the room, perched upon pillars of different sizes. A strikingly beautiful teakwood desk rests here.

Tiatyllin

An attractive blonde elf sits behind this desk during normal business hours. The elf is Tiatyllin, the high-priestess of the cult. She serves as the vault's frontwoman and manager, answering customers' questions and leading them through the paperwork. Tiatyllin is also an accomplished combatant, and wears a silver tiara to cover the third eye grafted onto her forehead, the focus of her powers as an ocular adept. If asked about the store's namesake, she informs the party that Mistress Vlindarian is a powerful treasure-hunter in her own right, and these days only stops in during random intervals between her extended adventures.

TIATYLLIN **CR 16**

Female elf cleric 6/ocular adept 10 (Great Mother)
LE Medium humanoid
Faiths and Pantheons 200
Init +6; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +13, Spot +17
Languages Beholder, Common, Elven

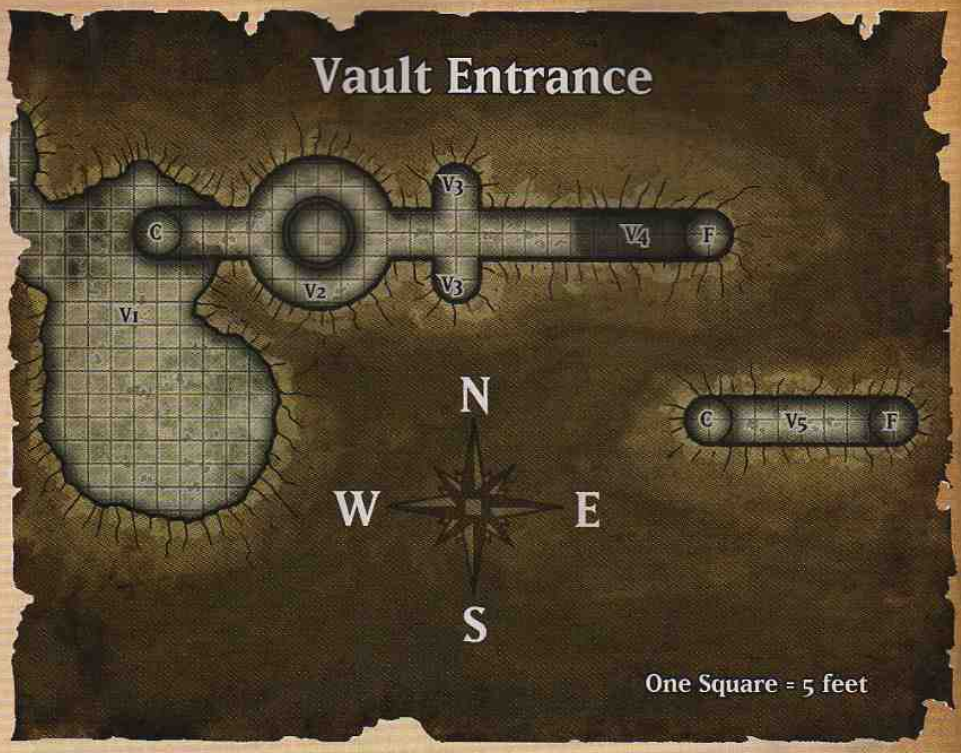
AC 19, touch 15, flat-footed 17
hp 78 (16 HD); Diehard
Immune sleep
Fort +11, **Ref** +9, **Will** +13 (+15 vs enchantment)

Spd 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)
Melee +1 *light mace* +14/+9/+4 (1d6)
Ranged eye ray +13 touch
Base Atk +11; **Grp** +10
Special Actions hatred (+2 profane bonus on attacks, saves, and AC vs. 1 opponent for 1 minute/day), feat of strength (+6 to Strength for 1 round/day), rebuke undead 6/day (+5, 2d6+9, 16th)
Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 6, +13 melee touch, +13 ranged touch):
3rd—*animate dead, invisibility purge, magic vestment*[D], *protection from energy*
2nd—*aid, bull's strength*[D], *desecrate, hold person* (DC 15), *owl's wisdom*
1st—*bane* (DC 14), *cause fear* (DC 14), *comprehend languages, doom*[D] (DC 14), *shield of faith*
0—*light, purify food and drink, read magic, resistance, virtue*
Ocular Adept Spells Prepared (CL 10, +13 melee touch, +13 ranged touch):
5th—*flame strike* (DC 18), *righteous might*[D], *spell resistance* (SR 22)
4th—*cure critical wounds, dimensional anchor, sending, spell immunity*[D]
3rd—*bestow curse*[D] (DC 16), *blindness/deafness* (DC 16), *cure serious wounds, deeper darkness, dispel magic*
2nd—*bear's endurance, bull's strength*[D], *cure moderate wounds* (2), *darkness, death knell* (DC 15)
1st—*cure light wounds, divine favor, endure elements, enlarge person*[D], *obscuring mist*
0—*cure minor wounds* (3), *detect magic, detect poison, guidance*
D Domain spell **Domains** Hatred, Strength

Abilities Str 8, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 16

Feats Alertness, Diehard, Endurance, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Weapon Finesse
Skills Concentration +9, Knowledge (religion) +8, Listen +13, Profession (bookkeeper) +5, Spellcraft +8, Spot +17
Possessions *+1 light mace, amulet of natural armor +4, ring of mind shielding, ring of protection +3, winged boots*, silver tiara (worth 150 gp).

Implanted Eyeball (Su) As a result of the third eye implanted on her forehead, Tiatyllin can use each of a standard beholder's ten eye rays twice per day. Firing a ray is a standard action that does not provoke attacks of opportunity. After each use, the eye closes and may not be used again on the next round. Range is 100 feet, with a save DC of 18.



O6. Manager's Bedroom

This room is a tastefully decorated bedroom, with plush bedding on the four-poster bed, a nightstand holding a pitcher of water, and a wardrobe. A jade green carpet covers the floor.

This room's appearance is the result of a *permanent illusion* that can be switched on and off via command word ("apprubia"). Vlindarian occasionally likes to remain close to the business side of things, and when the *permanent illusion* is switched off, the room can be seen for what it truly is: Vlindarian's magical workshop. The "wardrobe" is a cabinet containing various magical substances, the "bed" is a worktable upon which various tomes and scrolls are scattered, and the "nightstand" is small bookcase containing all types of spellbooks and grimoires.

A secret door on the eastern wall leads to the teleportation chamber.

O7. Teleportation Chamber

Hidden behind a set of thick double doors, this twenty-five-foot-square room's only feature is a fifteen-foot-diameter circle inscribed on the floor, surrounded by arcane runes.

The *teleportation circle* is permanent, and anyone stepping inside it is immediately teleported to area **V2** inside the Vault.

Additionally, Vlindarian has cast a permanent *alarm* spell on the floor just inside the double doors which mentally notifies it if anyone enters this room without first using the password ("grenaldo"). People teleporting into this room from area **V2** have one round to say the password before triggering the *alarm*.

O8. Bunkrooms (EL 16)

There are two of these rooms, each housing 5 slaad cult members. Each room contains three bunk beds, a set of chests (for spare clothes), and places on the walls to hang armor and weapons when not in use. At any given time, usually a third of the complement is off duty and relaxing in their bunks. All of the slaadi have been commanded by Vlindarian to remain in human shape while outside the vault unless combat requires them to revert to their true forms.

Two of the slaadi are captains allowed into the interior of the vault and entrusted with the command words to disarm the *alarm* spell and activate the *teleportation circle* in areas **O7** and **V2**, respectively.

Gray Slaadi (10): hp 95 each; *Monster Manual* 231.

O9. Privies

There are two privies here, one for the cult members and the other for the cult leader, Tiatyllin.

O10. Tiatyllin's Room

This room houses a bed, a dresser, and a small statue of the Great Mother, the supreme beholder deity. Tiatyllin is found here when her duties as the vault manager or cult leader do not require her elsewhere.

THE VAULT

Unless stated otherwise, the Vault interior is unlit. PCs without darkvision must supply their own light sources.

V1. Pyrohydra Lair (EL 15)

A cavern opens into the steep mountainside just ahead, the interior past its twenty-foot opening cloaked in darkness.

Vlindarian chose this mountain lair as a convenient place to locate its Vault. It is remote enough to ensure there are no close-by neighbors and the mated pair of pyrohydras lairing here ensure that most who stumble by do not live long.

The cave is somewhat kidney-shaped and has a distinctly dry, reptilian smell

about it. The bones of recent victims are strewn about the floor. The hungry pyrohydras attack anyone they see.

Twelve-Headed Pyrohydras (2): hp 135 each; *Monster Manual* 157.

Hidden behind an *illusory wall* on the cavern's ceiling, some 25 feet above the stone floor, is the accessway leading to the Vault. This accessway, carved by the beholders' disintegrate rays, is 10 feet in diameter and completely circular in cross-section, with absolutely smooth sides. Due to its curving nature, the PCs must walk single file or make Balance checks (DC 10) each round to walk two abreast.

V2. Teleport Pit (EL 4)

This naturally-occurring stone pit is one node of a permanent *teleportation circle* allowing material to be transferred from Vlindarian's office headquarters to the Vault. Creatures who teleport into this area via this route appear at the bottom of the 30-foot-deep pit. Hidden along the inner ridge of the pit are subtle runes that can be found with a DC 34 Search check, and a DC 34 Disable Device check renders them inoperative for 10 minutes. The command word required to activate the circle ("alubiar") is woven into the runes as well, and can be gleaned with a DC 25 Decipher Script check.

V3. Guard Stations (EL 16)

The tunnel here widens to the north and south before narrowing again and continuing into darkness.

Standing in the alcoves are two horned devils hired by Vlindarian to guard his vault from any intruders not directly part of its organization.

Horned Devils (2): hp 172 each; *Monster Manual* 55.

Tactics: The devils immediately attack any PC entering this area.

V4. Planar Gate

There is an area of impenetrable darkness (shown on the map) along this section of the entrance passageway. This is actually a permanent *gate*; as the PCs enter this area they feel a brief moment of dizziness and disorientation. A successful Knowledge (the planes) check against DC 20 allows a PC to recognize that he's passed into another plane. The portion of the Vault beyond the gate exists on the Elemental Plane of Fire, although this is not readily apparent. The only clue is a brief sensation of heat when traversing the darkened portion of the planar gate; this is heat from the Elemental Plane of Fire leaking through the interplanar passageway. Fortunately, the heat cannot penetrate into the Vault interior, as an insulating layer of solid rock surrounds it. The area of darkness is inherent to the *gate* and cannot be overcome by *light*, *daylight*, or similar spells. As soon as the PCs pass beyond the darkness, the rules for adventuring on the Elemental Plane of Fire come into effect (*Dungeon Master's Guide* 156).

Right at the edge of the darkness, the tunnel suddenly curves downwards.

V5. Vertical Shaft

As the darkness diminishes, the tunnel takes a sudden plunge straight down. Light emanates from the bottom of the shaft the tunnel has become.

The shaft extends straight down for 280 feet, with side branches at the 50-foot and 120-foot marks. The shaft leads to the edge of the chunk of rock, then out into the Elemental Plane itself. The beholder has taken precautions preventing elemental beings from using this as a "back door" into the vault: a variant of the *antipathy* spell prevents elemental beings from approaching within 100 feet of the pit's bottom, and two horizontal *walls of force* are in place at the 170-foot and 270-foot levels, keeping the fire that makes up the Plane from entering. However, embedded in the pit's walls at depths of 140 and 240 feet are rings of gemstone sensors. When a being or object breaks the plane at the 140-foot mark, the topmost *wall of force* instantaneously shuts off. When the being or object pierces the invisible plane marked by the gemstones at the 240-foot level, the topmost *wall of force* snaps back on while the 270-foot *wall of force* deactivates. One round after being switched off, the bottom *wall of force* returns.

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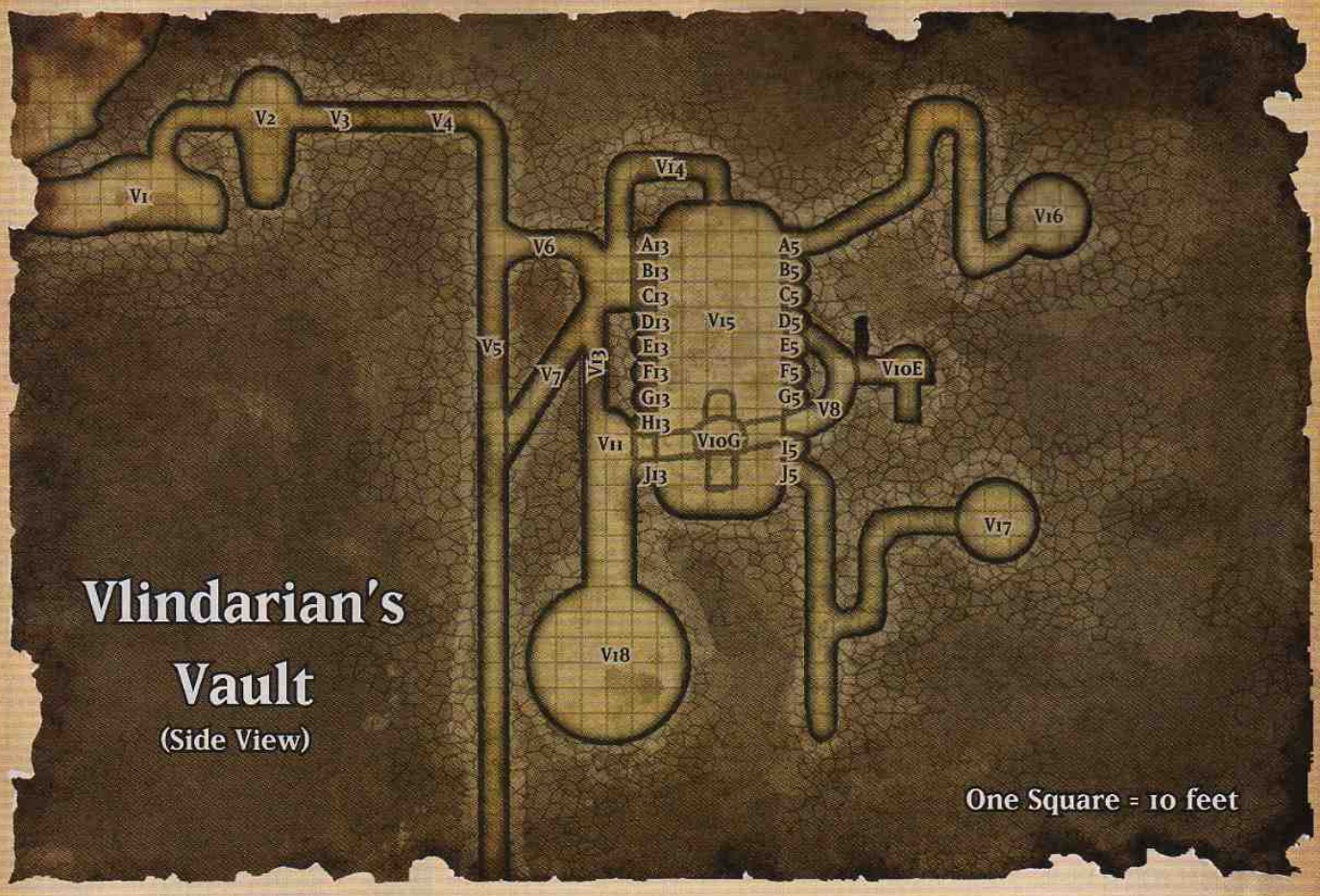


This setup allows the Vault inhabitants to pitch their garbage and waste into the pit and have it fall into the eternal flames of the Elemental Plane of Fire to be burned to ashes, all without risk to themselves. It could also be used offensively: a PC falling or hurled into the shaft soon finds himself in the Elemental Plane of Fire, taking 3d10 points of fire damage each round and running the risk of immolation as he falls 5,000 feet into a sea of magma (see *Dungeon Master's Guide* 304).

V6. Horizontal Passage (EL 20)

This short side passageway leads to the Vault interior. One end leads to the vertical shaft in area **V5**; the other end drops 20 feet to another horizontal section of passageway. Hidden halfway along the side of the 20-foot vertical passageway is a secret door holding the stone sphere of the trap detailed in area **V8**, and at the western end is a 10-foot-square trap door dropping anyone who steps on it into the garbage shaft in area **V7**.

V7. Garbage Shaft (EL 6)

Anyone stepping on the trap door in area **V6** above spills into this diagonal garbage shaft. Worse, the length of the shaft has been coated in a slippery substance with effects similar to a *grease* spell, launching the PC into the shaft in **V5** and out into the Plane of Fire.

Slippery Slope Trap: CR 6; mechanical; proximity trigger; automatic reset; DC 30 Reflex save avoids; jettisoned to the Elemental Plane of Fire; Search DC 25; Disable Device DC 30.

V8. Spiraling Ramp (EL 10)

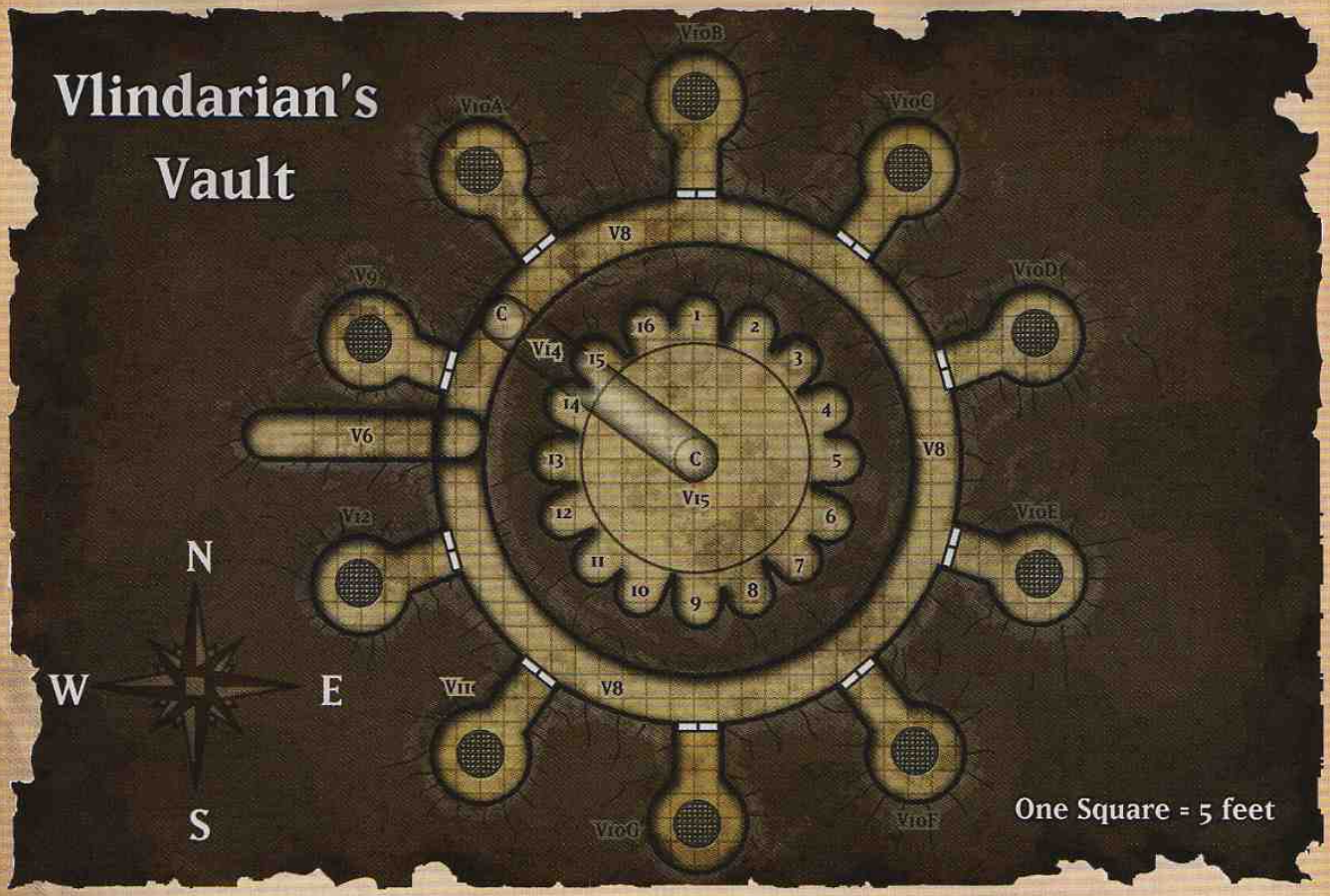
This corridor curves steeply down and to the right. A slight indention a short distance down the passageway indicates the possible presence of a door.

The corridor is circular with a 10-foot diameter, sloping downwards at a constant 30-degree angle. There are stone doors at roughly even intervals along the left side as one heads further down the slope. As a result of the corridor's slope, characters running "downhill" must make a DC 10 Balance check, and those running "uphill" move at half their normal speed.

Each stone door along this corridor is opened the hard way: by lifting the 250 lb. slab of stone into the slot directly upward (comfortably within the weight limit of a beholder's *telekinesis* ray). Due to the lack of handholds and the tight fit, lifting a stone door manually requires a DC 30 Strength check. Each door has a small (3-inch-by-4-inch) "window" carved into it, allowing one to peek inside the room when the door is closed.

Stone Doors: 4 in. thick; hardness 8; hp 60; Break DC 28.

The ceiling in the area between rooms **V9** and **V10A** is an *illusory wall* covering the passageway (area **V14**) to the actual Vault in area **V15**. The Vault's inhabitants are aware of this area and pass through the false ceiling via innate flight abilities or *spider climb* spells.



There is a Trap in this area and a corresponding lure. The area in front of the door to **V10A** is the trigger for a *magic mouth* spell. As soon as anyone steps onto the floor there, the magic mouth activates:

Suddenly, the silence is broken by a weak voice coming from beyond the door to the north. "Is anyone there?" it cries. "Please...help..." The voice breaks off and does not repeat.

This is merely a ruse to lure the PCs into the trap. Anyone standing before the door leading to area **V10B** (where the voice seems to be coming from) activates a trigger plate releasing the Trap. If triggered, read the following:

There is a great booming crash from up the sloping corridor, followed by the grinding sound of stone rubbing against stone, which grows steadily louder.

The trigger plate releases a giant stone sphere from the top of the corridor. The sphere is less than a foot thinner than the sloping corridor, and gravity sends it crashing down to run over the PCs. The stone sphere moves 10 feet the first round, 20 feet the second round, and 30 feet from then on as it builds up speed. There's no room for it to pass by the PCs without crushing them. The sphere continues its descent along the spiraling corridor until it reaches the end of the line just outside the door to area **V12**. At that point, it stays where it is until one of the beholders levitates it up the vertical corridor in area **V13** directly above and resets it back into place at the top of the sloping corridor.

Crushing Stone Sphere Trap: CR 10; mechanical; location trigger; repair reset; rolling rock (10d10+10); multiple targets (everyone in the corridor); never miss; onset delay (varies); Search DC 30, Disable Device DC 20.

The stone sphere is not solid, otherwise it would be too heavy for the beholders to levitate with their telekinesis eye rays. Instead, it's hollowed out and filled with green slime. A PC about to be crushed by the sphere can forgo his Reflex save and make an attack of opportunity with a –4 penalty against the sphere. The sphere is 4 inches thick with hardness 8 and 120 hp. Any single attack doing over 30 points of damage pierces the sphere's interior and sprays a 20-foot cone of green slime in the direction of the attack. The stone's complete destruction also releases the green slime (*Dungeon Master's Guide* 76).

Development: The rumbling of the stone sphere scraping its way down the sloping corridor can be heard throughout the entire part of the Vault complex on the Elemental Plane of Fire. If the Vault inhabitants were not already aware of the PCs' presence, they are after this trap is sprung. The beholders in area **V16** send two kobold warrior skeletons from area **V15** on a kamikaze mission to track down the interlopers and detonate their *necklace of fireball* beads. Four then follow at a

discrete distance, ready to attack once the conflagration has erupted.

V9. Water Pool

This first chamber is structurally identical to the cells in areas **V10A-G**, although it lacks the bars at the top of the pit. Instead, the pit is filled with water, courtesy of a *decanter of endless water*. The water is 15 feet deep; the decanter is stored at the pool's bottom.

V10A-G. Holding Pits (EL 7)

Use the following description of areas **V10A-G** if the PCs peek through the tiny window in the doors.

Beyond the door is a short passageway leading into a small, round room. The room appears empty save for a circular cover plate of iron bars centered in the floor.

The pits are 15-foot-deep cylinders with 10-foot diameters. The only escape from each pit is via the opening at the top, which is blocked by the barred cover plate. The bars are 6 inches apart, but the plate can be lifted with a Strength check (DC 25). The pit interiors are normally nonmagical, but after one round of being inhabited an *antimagic field* cast from the ceiling (fashioned from the magically preserved central eyes of enemy beholders slain by Vlindarian and its minions) fills the entire pit. The *antimagic field* remains active while the pit is occupied.

Currently, the only inhabited pit is **V10G**, which houses **Becka** (N female human commoner 1; 2 hp), a flower merchant taken from the city in which Vlindarian's office is located. She is unconscious and destined to eventually become food for the beholders. You should feel free to fill any of the other pits with NPCs to further your own campaign sub-plots. In addition, any captured PCs may find themselves alone in one of these pits, after being stripped of all armor, weapons, and items (which are placed in one of the alcoves in area **V15**).

V11. False Mirror

This chamber looks like the other holding pits, but without the bars. In addition, a small mirror with knobby projections hangs on the wall. However, unlike the other holding cells, the floor in this chamber is an *illusory wall* spell: anyone stepping into the room falls through the "floor" and down 110 feet to the floor of area **V18**, taking 11d6 points of falling damage.

This mirror is identical to the *mirror of life trapping* in the central vault, but has no magical properties.

V12. Fire Resistance Pool

This room is almost identical to room **V9**, but the pool is filled with a magical concoction of Vlindarian's creation providing the effects of a *resist energy* spell to anyone immersing himself in the liquid. Doing so provides the bather with fire resistance 30 for 12 hours. The vault inhabitants routinely coat themselves in this substance. Repeated exposure turns the soaker's skin (and bones, in the case of the kobold skeletons) a slightly reddish-orange hue.

V13. Vertical Access Tunnel

This area is the same width as the spiraling passageway (area **V8**). It tunnels straight up, then turns at the top to join back up with the vertical passageway at the top of the spiral. The beholders use this access shaft to drag the stone sphere back up to the top of the spiral and reset the trap.

V14. Vault Access Tunnel

Hidden behind a permanent *illusory wall* in the ceiling, this shaft provides the only entrance into the vault itself.

V15. The Vault (EL varies)

This huge chamber is an upright, one hundred and twenty-foot-tall cylinder with a fifty-foot diameter, carved from solid rock. Stacked one atop the other are ten rings of sixteen alcoves each, spaced equidistant around the cylinder; these openings look like small caves, stored in which are an amazing variety of objects—coins, chests, bones, and more.

Each alcove is annotated with an alphanumeric designation: A-J for the row ("A" being the topmost row; "J" closest to the floor), and 1–16 for the particular cave in that row (with "1" starting at the northernmost cave and continuing clockwise). Two of the caves, **A5** and **J5**, are actually the beginnings of tunnel networks leading to the beholders's sleeping chambers.

Some of the alcoves—those ending in the designation "13"—are where the ten animated kobold skeletons stay when not otherwise needed. Rather than remaining motionless (as is typical for most animated skeletons without anything else to do), the kobold skeletons pace back and forth and walk on the walls and ceilings of their particular cave, as watching them move helps the beholders "recharge" their eye rays.

Even if the PCs have already triggered some of Vlindarian's traps and *alarm* spells, the proud beholder and two of its minions are floating here observing their collection. While they don't bother to leave in search of the party beforehand, they attack hungrily and without mercy as soon as the first character presents himself.

VLINDARIAN **CR 20**

Beholder mage 7
LE Large aberration
Lords of Madness 42, *Monster Manual* 26
Init +7; **Senses** all-around vision, darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +18, Spot +22
Languages Beholder, Common, Elven, Ignan

AC 27, touch 12, flat-footed 24
hp 192 (18 HD)
Fort +13, **Ref** +8, **Will** +16

Spd 5 ft., fly 20 ft (good)
Melee bite +4 (2d4–1)
Ranged eye rays +13 touch
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 5 ft.
Base Atk +11; **Grp** +14
Atk Options Flyby Attack
Combat Gear *rod of absorption*
Spells Favored (CL 14, +9 melee touch, +13 ranged touch):
7th (3/day)—*greater teleport, prismatic spray* (DC 22)
6th (5/day)—*globe of invulnerability, Otiluke's freezing sphere* (DC 21)
5th (7/day)—*baleful polymorph* (DC 20), *prying eyes*
4th (7/day)—*arcane eye, Otiluke's resiliant sphere* (DC 19)
3rd (7/day)—*displacement, fireball* (DC 18)
2nd (7/day)—*mirror image, scorching ray*
1st (7/day)—*magic missile, shield*
0 (6/day)—all

Abilities Str 8, Dex 16, Con 22, Int 21, Wis 14, Cha 18
Feats Ability Focus (disintegrate eye ray), Ability Focus (flesh to stone eye ray), Alertness, Flyby Attack, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Improved Toughness (+1 hp/HD), Iron Will
Skills Appraise +14, Concentration +27, Hide +13, Knowledge (arcana) +19, Knowledge (the planes) +19, Knowledge (religion) +19, Listen +18, Search +23, Spellcraft +16, Spot +22, Use Magic Device +14 (+16 scrolls)
Possessions combat gear

Arcane Hands (Su) A beholder mage develops the ability to manipulate objects as if with a *mage hand* spell. This ability is constantly active and can not only manipulate objects but use magic items as well, as long as they don't need to be worn. The arcane hands have a Strength score equal to the beholder mage's class level, and can be used for anything a normal hand can, including attacks.
Eye Rays (Su) Vlindarian retains the use of his *flesh to stone*, *disintegrate*, and *charm monster* eye rays. All of the others are spell stalks.
Spells In order to cast spells, beholder mages are required to put out their central eye (removing their antimagic cone effect) and transform eyestalks into spell stalks incapable of producing rays. Casting spells in this manner is a free action, and each spell level is tied to a particular spell stalk, which may only be used once per round. The beholder limitation against turning more than three eyestalks in any particular direction still applies. Beholders do not require material components, and spells with gold-piece costs are paid with experience points at one-fifth the cost. Weaving spell stalks provide the somatic components, and the verbal requirements are fulfilled by the beholder's spellcasting song, which prevents it from using it's mouth to do anything else that round, such as speaking or biting.

Bzolgaur and Zvortyx, beholders: hp 93 each; *Monster Manual* 26.

Kobold Warrior Skeletons (10) CR 1/3
CE Small undead
Libris Mortis 158

Init +6; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +2, Spot +2
AC 14, touch 13, flat-footed 12
hp 6 (1 HD); **DR** 5/bludgeoning
Immune cold, undead traits
Fort +0, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2
Spd 30 ft.
Melee spear +0 (1d6–1/×3) or 2 claws +0 (1d3)
Ranged bead from *necklace of fireballs* +2 (5d6)
Base Atk 0; **Grp** –3
Combat Gear 5d6 bead from *necklace of fireballs*
Abilities Str 9, Dex 15, Con —, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 1
Feats Improved Initiative
Possessions spear

Tactics: Vlindarian has the vault's inventory memorized, and may pick up magic items and use them against the party (see Treasure, below). When feeling particularly playful, it enjoys *polymorphing* people into blowfish, fat little pigeons, and other round animals before consuming them.

Treasure: As Vlindarian's Vault only recently opened, many of the caves are currently unoccupied, but feel free to include up to 100,000 gp worth of magic items tailored to your campaign.

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

"Vlindarian's Vault" is designed for a party of four 18th-level PCs but can be adapted for PCs of levels 16–20. For PCs of levels 16–17, consider dropping one horned devil and lowering the classed NPCs by one or two class levels. For PCs of levels 19–20, add one or two more beholders to area **V15** and add one or two class levels to the classed NPCs. Remember to adjust the treasure accordingly.

Alcove **D13** contains an unusual, highly ornate silver mirror.

The mirror is a *mirror of life trapping* with 8 separate cells. It's currently active, so anyone looking into it runs the risk of being captured inside one of the vacant cells. Vlindarian knows the command words to release the creatures inside—divination magic can reveal the command words, and Use Magic Device can be used to blindly trigger creatures' releases. Additionally, Vlindarian has altered the mirror to be able to capture a creature's equipment, and has bound an ultroloth to serve as the mirror's guardian—anyone attempting to Use Magic Device on the mirror sends the creature springing forth into the room, ready for slaughter.

Breaking the mirror releases the creatures trapped in the extradimensional cells; the ultroloth immediately begins attacking the PCs, and after one round of disorientation, the death slaad does the same in a desperate bid for freedom.

Death Slaad: hp 142; *Monster Manual* 231.

ADVANCED ULTROLOTH **CR 19**

NE Medium outsider (evil, extraplanar, yugoloth)

Monster Manual III 204

Init +3; **Senses** Listen +32, Spot +34

Aura hypnotic gaze (DC 29)

Languages Abyssal, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 30, touch 13, flat-footed 27

hp 345 (30 HD); **DR** 15/good

Immune poison, acid

Resist cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10 **SR** 25

Fort +24, **Ref** +20, **Will** +21

Spd 30 ft.

Melee +5 *keen longsword* +39 (1d8+10/17–20)

Base Atk +30; **Grp** +34

Special Actions *summon yugoloth*

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 18th, +34 melee touch, + 34 ranged touch):

At will—*alter self, deeper darkness, desecrate, fear* (DC 18), *gaseous form, greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *invisibility, prying eyes, ray of enfeeblement, ray of exhaustion, scorching ray, scrying, see invisibility, suggestion* (DC 17), *wall of fire*

3/day—*binding* (DC 22), quickened *enervation, geas/quest* (DC 20), *mass suggestion* (DC 20)

1/day—*symbol of death* (DC 22)

Abilities Str 19, Dex 16, Con 24, Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 19

Feats Ability Focus (hypnotic gaze), Combat Casting, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Iron Will, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*scorching ray*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*enervation*), Weapon Focus (ray)

Skills Bluff +34, Concentration +40, Diplomacy +35, Intimidate +39, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (the planes) +36, Listen +32, Move Silently +33, Search +33, Sense Motive +21, Spellcraft +38, Spot +34

Possessions *+5 keen longsword, +5 leather armor, belt of giant strength +6, amulet of natural armor +2*

Hypnotic Gaze (Su) *Hypnotic pattern* as cast by an 18th-level sorcerer, no HD limit, 30 feet, Will DC 29 negates. The save DC is Charisma-based.

Summon Yugoloth (Sp) Once per day, an ultroloth can attempt to summon 1d4 nycaloths, 1d6 mezzoloths, or another ultroloth with a 35% chance of success.

If "litanu" is spoken aloud, Sumerthain appears in the mirror in her human form, disheveled and without any of her possessions. If "lerobu" is spoken, Sumerthain is freed from the mirror.

Sumerthain, *feebleminded* young adult silver dragon: hp 202, *Monster Manual* 87.

V16–V17. Beholder Lairs

These two 30-foot-diameter spherical rooms are where the assorted beholders sleep in shifts, with Vlindarian choosing to sleep either in the vault or in its workshop. The cavern floors are littered with chunks what appear to be shattered humanoid statues along with empty jars of *stone salve*—remnants of numerous beholder meals.

Creatures: Four of Vlindarian's beholder servants are relaxing here when the adventure begins. If the stone trap in area **V8** is triggered or they hear the sound of combat coming from the vault, they send two skeletons and then venture forth to investigate.

Chrichtung, Brottlmax, Tymorac, and Xankirsch, beholders: hp 100, *Monster Manual* 25.

V18. Fiendish Pit Trap (EL 20)

In a capricious display of power, Vlindarian captured a pit fiend with scrolls of *gate* and *binding* and holds it in this barren cavern bottom as a trap, flying down frequently to torment the demon with its central eye. As a result, the fiend is extremely irritable, and expresses its displeasure to any PCs who drop into its lair.

Ralthak, Pit Fiend: hp 225; *Monster Manual* 57-58. Note that while on the Elemental Plane of Fire, its *fireball* and *meteor swarm* spell-like abilities do maximum damage.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs rescue Sumerthain and the *feebleminded* is attended to, Glistern pays the promised reward gratefully, and may decide to reveal his and his mate's true identities, in which case the PCs have acquired some valuable allies. At the same time, Sumerthain's original kidnappers remain on the loose, and documents in the shop's office may contain clues as to their identities and whereabouts, in which case the two dragons happily fund an expedition to bring them to justice. The vault itself is left up for grabs, and should the PCs decide to retain control of it, the local populace accepts the change of ownership with barely a second thought.

This is Johnathan's 11th appearance in DUNGEON, *half being entries in his "Challenge of Champions" series.*

IT'S JUST YOU AND THEM (AND THE RULES)

BY MONTE COOK
BY KYLE HUNTER

This month, I want to talk about the easy questions—questions so easy that they often go unanswered. Even if you're an old hand at DMing (in fact, especially if you're an old hand at DMing), I want you to stop for a moment and wonder why we're playing these games in the first place.

I've written this before, but it's worth repeating: You are the sole conduit between the players and the fictional reality of the game. You provide them with all the details of what they experience, and the results of their desired actions.

On that same note, that means you have only them to answer to when it comes to the style of play you encourage, the interpretations you make on the rules, and ultimately the game you provide. No one else can judge your game. If everyone's having fun, that's all that matters.

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Before you start your next session, whether it's the first of a new campaign or the lat-

est in a campaign that's been going for years, you should stop for a moment and think about what you want to get out of it. In essence, why do you run games in the first place?

Is it the escape? Do you simply seek to give yourself (and a handful of your friends) something to think about that doesn't involve school, work, or bills? Do you just want to think about swordsmen with magic blades, bloodthirsty yuan-ti, and crystalline vaults filled with glittering treasures (or spaceships and aliens, superheroes, or whatever genre you prefer)?

Is it the thrill of making stories? The desire to be a part of a story's creation (perhaps the most important part of the story's creation), working together with the players to craft a tale of excitement and emotion? Do you get energized at the thought of deciding what NPCs will do in given situations and how the world changes based on what the players do?

Is it to challenge your friends with crafty puzzles and difficult situations? Do you want to take part in tactical simulations, controlling NPCs and monsters on the battlegrid?

Or is your ultimate reason for playing simply because it's an excellent creative outlet? Do you want to create new places, characters, beings, and spells? Do you love to craft imaginary histories and populate invented landscapes?

Obviously, it can be any or all of these things, or something else entirely. It's important, however, to know why you're playing the game. Being a Dungeon Master is a huge outlay of time and effort. At times it can be mentally exhausting and draining, and once in a while it might even be frustrating or maddening. But if you know what you want to get out of it, and you keep that in the back of your mind, you'll know to tailor the game to reach those ends.

In other words, if what you really like is pitting the players against interesting foes in a challenging environment of your choosing, don't neglect to include that. It seems almost silly to have to say it, but I've seen it happen more than once. You're the DM—run a game that you think is fun. Fun for you as the DM, and fun if you were a player. Don't be bullied or coerced into running a game you don't want to play—not by the players, not by other DMs you talk to, not by what you read on the Internet, not by what the rulebooks say, and not even by what you read in this magazine.

If you feel like running an all-randomly-generated, all-dungeon campaign, there's no one in a position to tell you you're wrong. If you want to run a game using a blend of 2nd-edition D&D and *Boot Hill* where all the PCs are hot-air-balloon-racing pilots that never engage in combat (and if you can find players who will play)—go for it. If your game runs counter to all the DM advice you've ever read but it's still fun, then there's no reason to stop.

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

I've written this before as well, but it's important. You've got to think about what the players want to get out of the game. That's not a contradiction with the previous section, simply because a game can be many things. It doesn't have to be solely a hack-and-slash affair, solely a storytelling session, or only a medieval historical recreation.

Like you, players might be in it for the joy of creating stories, the excitement of engaging in imaginary battles, the fun of playing a character other than themselves, or the satisfaction of overcoming challenges. Your tastes don't have to match up exactly with your players' in order to run a good game. If they just want to kill things, but you want more character development, nudge them toward more roleplaying encounters as much as you can while still providing them with monsters to slay as well. There's room in a game to satisfy many different kinds of gamers.

In my own group of the last few years, for example, I've got two players who mostly enjoy roleplaying their characters and reacting to (and sometimes instigating) events. I've got another pair that prefers the tactical side of things, creating characters that can effectively deal damage. And then I've got two other players who mostly like to get things done—the thrill of accomplishment is important to them. Fortunately, each person isn't a solitary dogmatist. The tacticians like to roleplay a bit, the roleplayers enjoy a good fight now and again, and so on.

The point is, however, that I need to make sure to provide some opportunities for each player to get what they want out of the game each week, while at the same time making sure that I have fun, too. So for example, I might create a situation where the PCs, eager to rescue some captured slaves, must inquire at many varied sources to gain the information needed to find the slaves and put the smackdown on the slavers and their allies. Now, everyone's happy.

AND WHAT ABOUT THOSE RULES?

There is a third component in the mix besides the DM and the players, and that's the game itself. Not that the game has an outlook, an opinion, or desires (or even if it did, that they would matter). What does matter is how you and the players interact with the rules while you interact with each other. It's all in how you view the rules as a group, and how you use the rules as both players and DM.

Let me explain by example. The PCs go into a room in an evil temple, and you say, "As you enter the darkened chamber, there is a sudden but dim flare of light. A single tindertwig has lit itself, it would seem, and now proceeds to light the wicks of a sinister candelabra, one by one."

There are many things that can happen next. For instance, a player might shout, "We've got to keep those candles from lighting—I just know it will be bad!" while another adds, "It's probably an invisible stalker. I can see what square it's likely in because of what it's holding, so I'll fire as many arrows as I can at it before it can finish and take my chances with the miss chance."

As the PC rolls some dice, you consult your game notes. It might very well be an invisible stalker or, in keeping with the rules, you might have designed it to be an *unseen servant*. Or, still in keeping

with the rules but stretching them a bit farther, you might have designed the effect to be a sort of triggered *mage hand* that lights and moves the twig. Or you might have ignored the core rules altogether and designed it as a unique magical effect—the tindertwig just lights the candles when the room is entered, end of story.

DM Versus the Rules: Who's Really in Charge, Here?

The distinction is important, and it comes down to how much of a stickler you and the players are with the rules. Do you feel free to go beyond and even outside the rules when creating your scenarios and encounters, or do you figure that there's enough within the bounds of the rules that there's no need to create ad-hoc effects or new conditions? Do the rules define the bounds of the fictional reality, or are they a starting point or common ground?

If I may, I'd like to strongly encourage the latter. This is a game of creativity, and the DM should be allowed to create new material, new rules, or special effects that help bring your vision to life. Conversely, you should be able to disallow rules and options that don't fit into that vision.

This means that a human character who grew up in a dwarven town might be granted stonecunning. It means that a magical trap might include a *shrinking ray* that reduces characters to 1 inch tall so that the rest of the adventure pits them against normal-sized cockroaches and a housecat. It means that an angel might just wave its hand and bring two dead characters back to life since they died in the service of the deity it serves. Ultimately, it means that you're in control, not the rules.

The drawback is that sometimes players feel ill at ease in this situation, and for good reason. Some DMs take their power too far and wield it inappropriately. For example:

DM: *"So the wall falls on you and you're dead."*
Player: *"Don't I get a save or anything? Shouldn't we roll damage? My character's got 135 hp and a Con score of 22!"*

Or inconsistently:

DM: *"The Climb DC to get up this wall is 25."*
Player: *"Huh? It was 15 to climb up the wall just like it last session."*

Or annoyingly:

Player: *"I'd like to use Escape Artist to wriggle free of these ropes and get away."*
DM: *"Well, you can't."*
Player: *"I haven't even rolled yet."*
DM: *"They're special, um, magic ropes."*

I once played in a terrible game where the DM acted like a puppet master, making strange things happen seemingly at random, using the "It's magic!" excuse. If there was a storyline to follow, it was only in his head. We, as players, felt powerless and the game seemed pointless. Another bad game I was in once had a DM who was so wishy-washy that he could be talked out of almost any event dictated by the rules that went against the PCs. This game offered no challenge, and ultimately, no fun. In both cases, the DM was abusing his power—just in different ways.

There's a fine line, then, in using the rules to define the "laws of reality," which is good, and using the rules to hamstring the DM's options, which is bad. The rules should be both fair and consistent, no matter what the DM wishes. And if for some reason you can only choose one of those, choose consistent. If something works one way and then two weeks later it works differently with no explanation, not only do the players lose their suspension of disbelief, they lose their ability to decide how to interact with the world around them, which is far worse. They can't make intelligent decisions based on unreliable information on how the different choices might pan out. This takes away the only power the players have in the game: the power to choose.

Players Versus the Rules: The Power of the Players

Let's go back to our evil temple scenario again. You may have set up the candle-lighting bit as just a window-dressing effect that is impossible to prevent or forestall.

This is bad.

If the rules—in this case, the rules of the encounter as you've designed it—prevent player choice ("Do we stop the candles from being lit or not?") or player interaction, that's called railroading the plot, and leads to players becoming quickly dissatisfied with their role, or lack thereof. The PCs should have a chance of acting before all the candles are lit, even if doing so accomplishes nothing. Likewise, they should have a chance of stopping the creature or effect, whatever it is. Even if it's just an ad-hoc effect, a *dispel magic* ought to have a chance of canceling it. The key word in all of this is "chance." The PCs shouldn't necessarily always succeed, but they should always have the opportunity to try.

In a way, all a roleplaying game is—for players—is a series of choices. Some of them are complex ("How do we deal with the evil cult?"), some are not so bad ("Which spell should I cast this round?"), and some are easy ("Should we fight or should we flee?"). But if you think about it, everything the PCs do in the game is based on player choice—or at least it should be. If you announce, "The city guard arrests you and throws you in jail, where you sit and wait for a month," you've taken all the power out of the player's hands. In effect, it's stopped being a game. Now you're just telling them a story in the second person point of view.

IT'S A GAME

By asking ourselves why we play this game, and why our friends play it with us, we gain insight into how best to run the game. By looking at how we play the game, we consider the roles each of us, player and DM, has around the table.

Ultimately, it's all about having fun. That's why it's called a game. Everyone has fun in different ways, however, so it's a complex process of figuring out how to interact with each other, and with the rules, to arrive at that fun.

Monte Cook is the author of the Dungeon Master's Guide. *Check out his publishing company, Malhavoc Press, at montecook.com.*

SLUM DWELLERS

BY PHILLIP LARWOOD
BY KYLE HUNTER

The homeless, poor, and disenfranchised members of society are often as overlooked in a fantasy setting as they are in the real world, yet just as the reclusive sage or conniving merchant can provide opportunities for adventure, so can the uncared-for and forgotten faces in the gutter. That beggar pleading for coppers to feed his sick children and the crippled war veteran down on his luck could be a lot more than they seem, serving as sources of unexpected danger, unusual information, or extraordinary quests.

DASK PORTFELLOW

Dask Portfellow (LN male human expert 4) was once a major importer of exotic curios, including giant clam shells polished to an opalescent sheen, bottled ankheg eggs in spice wine vinegar, jars of formian royal jelly, and dinosaur bone amulets. During one of his routine trips to the southern cities, Dask picked up a rare collection of unusual blades. Unfortunately, the blades turned out to be stolen, and when he got home his shop was utterly destroyed by a force of bony, yellow-skinned humanoids. Dask fled the city and spent the next several months skipping from town to town evading attempts on his life. With nowhere left to turn, he finally bit back his pride and hid himself in the slums of a metropolis, where he has been living in squalor ever since.

Dask hardly resembles the man he once was, having deliberately concealed his features beneath grime and wearing little more than dirty rags. He still has a considerable amount of wealth hidden away, but it does him no good against the githyanki, who seek both the return of the *silver swords* stolen from them and revenge for the insult.

When the erstwhile merchant meets the PCs he appears as just another beggar, yet if he recognizes them as heroes he approaches with a desperate plea to free him from his fate. Dask still possesses two of the *silver swords* hidden away in an underground vault (a *+4 defending greatsword* and a *+1 vorpal greatsword*), and offers them to the PCs if they can end the githyanki threat.

FEDROWINA

Fedrowina (CN female human rogue 2/favored soul 1) is still only a child, but has already become an accomplished street acrobat and cutpurse. Abandoned when she was a baby, Fedrowina was taken in and raised by a kindly noble family until they both died in a freak lightning strike. Though she was in the same ill-fated carriage when her caretakers perished, Fedrowina remained curiously untouched and took to the streets, where she discovered uncanny new abilities and soon took up with a group of street urchins working for the local beggars' union.

Fedrowina is a whippet-thin girl in her early teens with short-cropped black hair, bright gray eyes, and a disarming smile. She wears baggy clothes that conceal her gender, and doesn't look quite as grubby as some of the other street children.

Recently, Fedrowina has been recieving visions from Olidammara, the god of thieves, telling her that great things are in store for her. This has wakened in her the powers of a favored soul and the divinity unique ability found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide II* (which gives her the granted power of the Luck domain and a +2 bonus on all saving throws). Since discovering her powers, Fedrowina has become something of a celebrity among the destitute souls of the street, though the church of Olidammara operating in the local thieves' guild has not yet officially recognized her.

Fedrowina's latest vision involves the PCs, and she and her devotees trail them throughout the city as she seeks to understand the vision. PCs may or may not become aware of the beggars' union following them, but are eventually approached by the little girl and told of her cryptic visions.

NALASK OLGARAT

The malicious and evil **Nalask Olgarat** (CE advanced male ghast) is an exceptionally horrid ghast who wears a *hat of disguise* and takes the form of a simple dung sweeper, using the filthy nature of his task to explain his abhorrent smell. Many people know Nalask from when he was alive, before the death of his brother to a pack of ghouls. What they do not know is that Nalask was also wounded, and later succumbed to ghoul fever while "recovering" from his grief over the loss of his brother. Now Nalask goes about his old job during the day, keeping up the pretence of being a dung sweeper while stalking potential victims. At night he assumes his normal form and leads the remaining ghouls that managed to evade the city guards. Nalask recently contacted a cult of Vecna and agreed to serve them as a spy and assassin.

In human form, Nalask appears as a pudgy man with a considerable number of warts and a balding pate. His clothing is spotted with waste, and he carries a bucket and broom with him everywhere. His ghast form is similar but more emaciated, with thick purplish skin and gleaming yellow eyes.

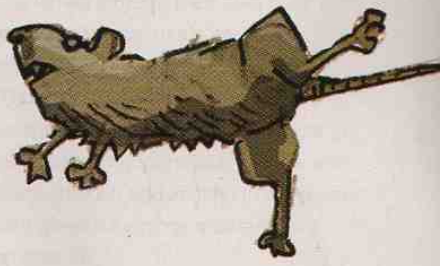
PCs may run into Nalask after investigating disappearances in the area, cleaning up the remaining ghouls, or by becoming involved with the cult of Vecna. Whatever the context, the ghast is a force to be reckoned with.

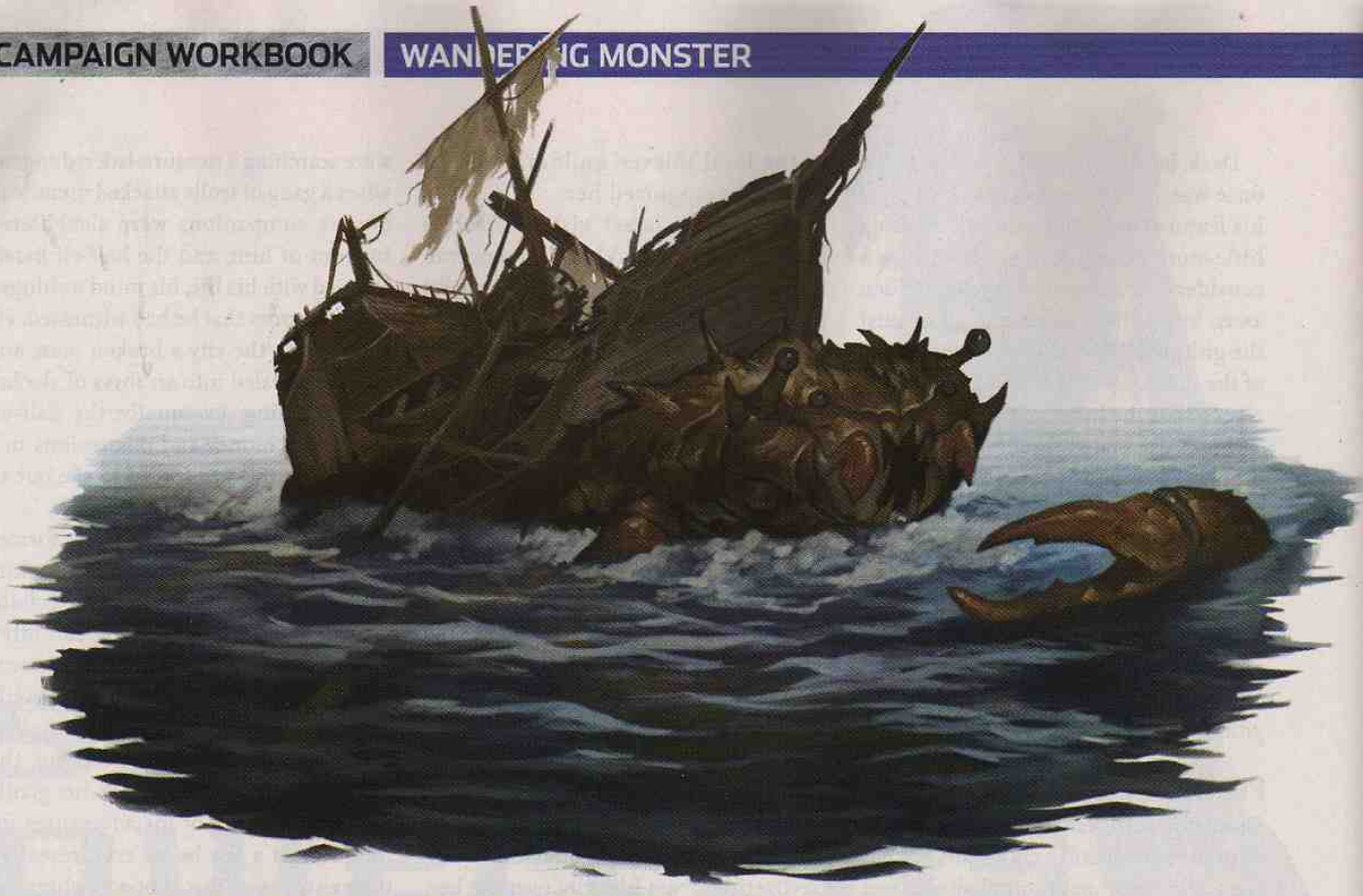
VULDERAN BLACKCREST

The former adventurer **Vulderan Blackcrest** (NG male half-elf fighter 6) is a beggar in a small city on the outskirts of civilization. Once moderately successful as part of the Gilded Drake adventuring company, Vulderan and his companions were searching a treasure-laden dungeon when a gang of trolls attacked them. Vulderan's companions were slaughtered in front of him, and the half-elf barely escaped with his life, his mind unhinged by the horrors that he had witnessed. He returned to the city a broken man, and quickly spiraled into an abyss of alcohol and gambling. Eventually, the half-elf lost all his money and possessions in a card game and was forced to eke out an existence on the streets.

Vulderan is a shadow of his former self, with sallow, pockmarked skin, greasy black hair, and beer-stained clothing. He smells of booze, and can often be seen out in front of the city's taverns and drinking lodges, clutching a bottle of cheap ale and wallowing in self-pity.

PCs who manage to befriend the drunken half-elf find that he gladly recounts the days of his adventures for the price of a few beers, even revealing the existence of the dungeon where his companions perished. If pressed (and if the PCs can understand his emotional ravings), he reveals the location of the dungeon, but warns the PCs not to go there, explaining that while the rewards are great, the things lurking within the dungeon should never be disturbed. Vulderan still possesses a special darkwood key that he found in the dungeon before his friends were killed, and he offers it to the PCs if they insist on traveling to the dungeon despite his protests. What the darkwood key unlocks is a mystery, but one the PCs can only discover if they head to the dungeon that ruined Vulderan's life.





LIVING SHIPWRECK

BY RICHARD PETT
BY WARREN MAHY

This is a creature so vast it looks like an island—a gargantuan jumble of destroyed ships and splintered timbers, decayed flotsam and lost hope. Carrying this vast tangle of misery is a gigantic crablike creature with claws big enough to snap a ship in half, cliff walls of shell towering over the creature's mast-like limbs.

LIVING SHIPWRECK **CR 18**

Usually N Colossal magical beast (aquatic)

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, Listen +9, Spot +9

Aura crabsong (300 ft., DC 20)

Language Aquan

AC 36, touch –1, flat-footed 36 (–8 size, –3 Dex, +37 natural armor)

hp 324 (24 HD), fast healing 20

Immune mind-affecting, paralysis, poison, sonic

Resist cold 30

Fort +24, **Ref** +11, **Will** +8

Spd 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

Melee* 2 claws +29 (2d8+23/19–20) and bite +24 (4d6+14/19–20)

Space 30 ft.; **Reach** 30 ft.

Base Atk +24; **Grp** +58

Atk Options Awesome Blow, constrict (4d8+23), crabsong, Improved Bull Rush, improved grab (bite), Improved Suder, Power Attack, swallow whole, trample (2d8+27; DC 40), vessel attack

*5-point Power Attack

Abilities Str 46, Dex 4, Con 26, Int 8, Wis 10, Cha 6

SQ amphibious

Feats Awesome Blow, Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Critical (claw), Improved Initiative, Improved Sunder, Power Attack

Skills Listen +9, Spot + 9, Swim +35

Advancement 25-60 HD (Colossal)

Crabsong (Su) As it trundles through the sea, a living shipwreck emits a combination of low rumbles and high-pitched keens, made by forcing water through its shell and segmented limbs. This eerie song causes all creatures within a 300-foot-radius to succeed on a DC 20 Will save or become captivated. This is a sonic, mind-affecting, charm effect. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by the same shipwreck's song for 24 hours. The save DC is Charisma-based. Captivated creatures remain so for as long as the shipwreck remains above water, even if the beast quits moving (and therefore singing), but receive an additional saving throw every 24 hours.

A captivated victim immediately approaches the shipwreck by the most expedient means and establishes permanent residency on the creature's back. While creatures attempting to do so may become reckless in their rush to reach the shipwreck, they will not engage in blatantly suicidal actions. They will, however, defend their new homes against all threats—including former allies. A bard's countersong ability allows the captivated creature to attempt a new Will save.

Swallow Whole (Ex) A living shipwreck can try to swallow a grabbed opponent of a smaller size than itself by making a successful grapple check. Once inside, the opponent takes 2d6+6 bludgeoning damage and 8 points of acid damage. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by dealing 40 points of damage to the gizzard (AC 20). Once the creature exits, muscular action seals the hole. The creature's gullet can hold 1 Gargantuan, 2 Huge, 4 Large, 8 Medium, or 16 Small or smaller creatures.

Vessel Attack (Ex) A living shipwreck is adept at tearing vessels apart to add to its stony carapace. A living shipwreck ignores the first 10 points of hardness of objects it attacks.

"Living shipwrecks," "wreckrevenants," "debacles of the sea," or "sailors' curses" are huge creatures that scour the seas searching for ships to add to their shells—they deliberately gather such ruin to enhance their fearsome appearance, to attract mates, and to keep their few enemies (notably krakens) at bay.

Living shipwrecks are malevolent scavengers that rarely swim beneath the surface, preferring instead to lurk just beneath the waters and appear as small islands with shattered hulks of ships and torn sails. The creatures tend to launch their initial attacks against vessels themselves, attempting to tear the ships apart and saving the tasty morsels that cling to them for later.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Predators of opportunity, living shipwrecks spend most of their time wandering shallow seas along busy trading lanes, searching for ships and debris to add to their collection. When a shipwreck or one of its symbiotic residents detects a vessel, it hunches motionless on the sea floor, hoping the interlopers will come to investigate. If possible, it waits until some of the vessel's inhabitants board its back before attacking, but it's not above striking out as soon as the ship is within reach. In combat, its first action is to resume moving, engaging its crabsong ability and hopefully throwing the ship's crew into chaos as it begins snapping masts and smashing through the hull below the waterline, scuttling the craft. At the same time, this is the cue for any creatures already living on the creature's back to rush into the fray in "defense" of their home. Once the vessel has been successfully capsized, the shipwreck picks through the survivors at its leisure, devouring any not displaying the proper devotion before affixing the fresh derelict to its back.

The living shipwreck only seeks to escape combat when reduced to 100 hit points or less, at which time it abandons its passengers and dives for deeper water, freeing its tenants from its song.

ECOLOGY

Living shipwrecks are similar in many ways to enormous crabs, scuttling along the ocean bottom in waters not quite deep enough to cover them, feasting on carrion and the occasional sea creature that passes too close to its claws. Other than its size (and the strangely seductive song produced as air and water are forced through valves in its shell), the beast's most distinguishing trait is its massive humped shell, rock-hard and adorned with a lifetime's worth of junk and debris. When a shipwreck comes across a sunken vessel (or a naïve ship that steers too close to the apparent island), it covers the find in sticky mucous secreted from its mandibles, then arranges it carefully on the back of its shell. Within minutes, the mucous hardens into cement, permanently affixing the treasure to the shipwreck's shell and making the beast more attractive to others of its kind. Older shipwrecks have been seen with dozens of ships, and even the occasional seaside building, glued to their carapaces, and plants frequently grow in the dirt and grime that accumulates on the wandering behemoths.

TREASURE

While living shipwrecks care nothing for treasure beyond a pressing desire to make their shells seem larger and more imposing, merchant vessels attached to their backs frequently contain stores of gold and trade goods which may or may not be hoarded by any enthralled inhabitants of the shipwreck's mobile graveyard.

LIVING SHIPWRECK LORE

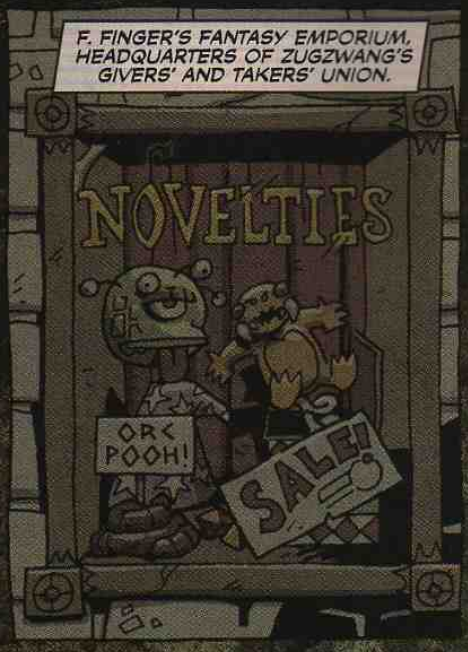
Knowledge (Arcana)

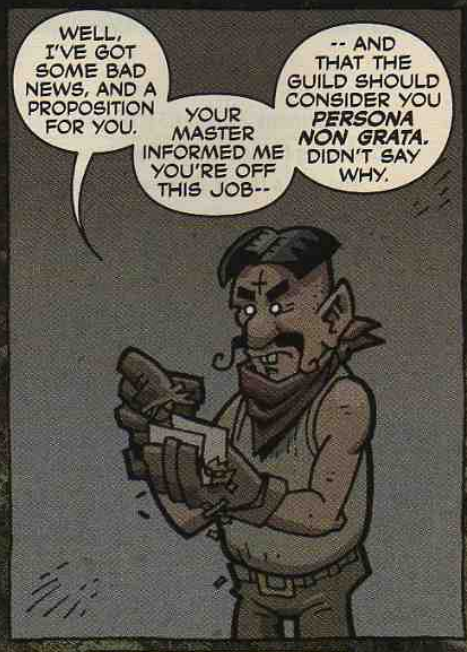
DC	Result
18	This creature is an enormous, crab-like magical beast that adorns its shells with derelict ships.
28	Living shipwrecks are capable of emitting a strange dirge that seduces sailors into abandoning their ships and attacking allies.
33	Shipwreck claws are capable of crunching through thick ship hulls with ease, snapping masts as if they were twigs.
38	This creature's thick carapace and unique physiology make it immune to mind-affecting, paralysis, poison, and sonic effects, and its time in the deep sea gives it extreme resistance to cold.

Downer XVIII

Fool's Errand

I've finally met my client, the dragon Kroiph, contestant in a cosmic game for godhood. Now that we've dispatched his rival, a chronofyryn timelord, my job is plum simple: take the slaad/modron omnifoetus to the crossroads of the multiverse. Right.

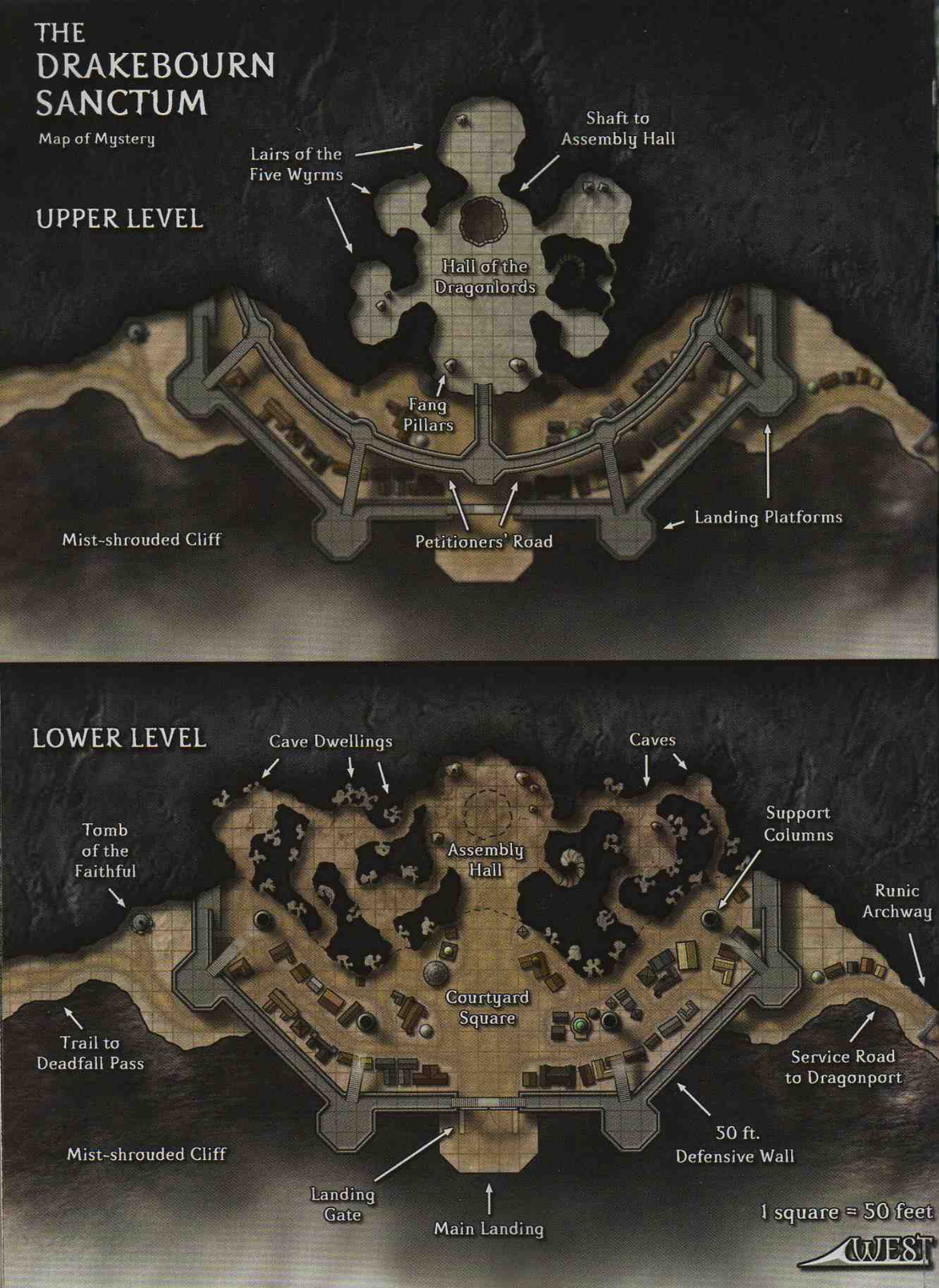



WELL, I'VE GOT SOME BAD NEWS, AND A PROPOSITION FOR YOU.
YOUR MASTER INFORMED ME YOU'RE OFF THIS JOB--
-- AND THAT THE GUILD SHOULD CONSIDER YOU *PERSONA NON GRATA.* DIDN'T SAY WHY.

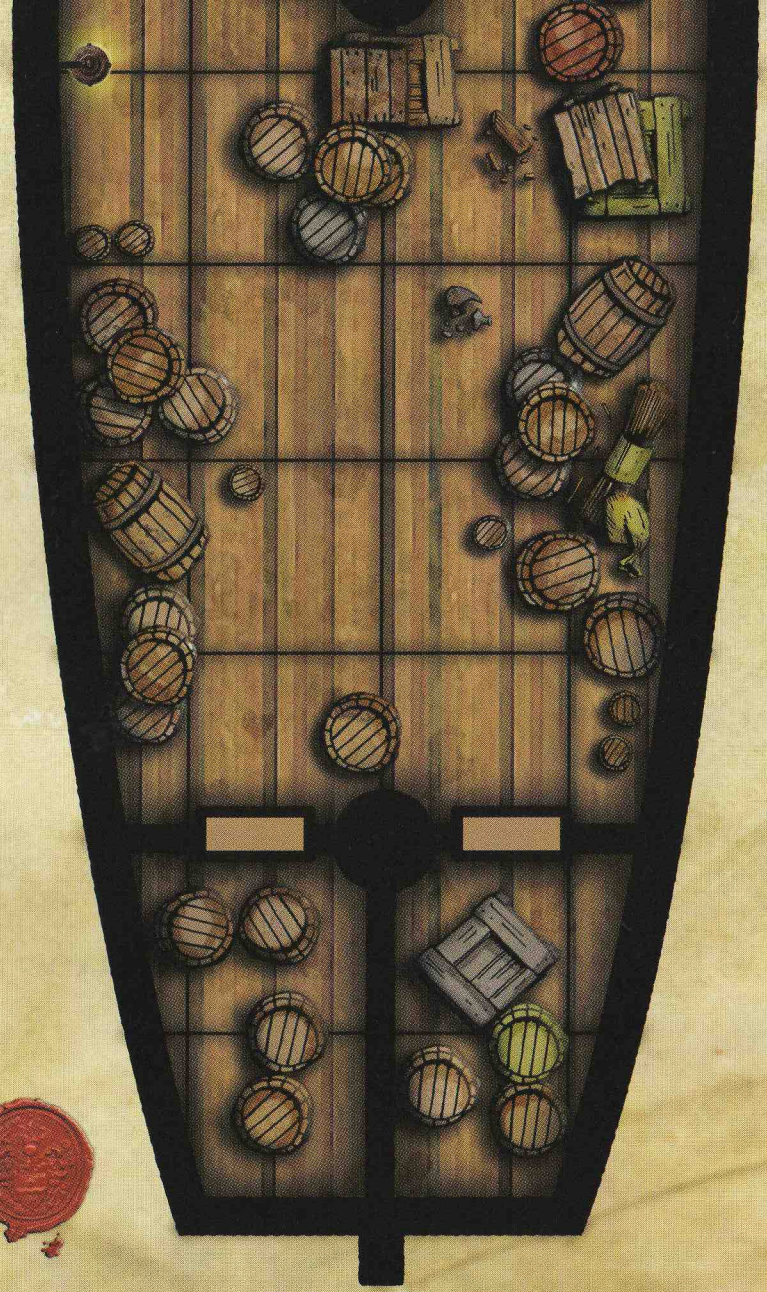
"THAT MUST BE WHAT THE NEEDLEMAN WAS TRYING TO WARN ABOUT."
"KALRO KNOWS HOW TO PICK HITMEN. THAT SHADAR-KAI ASSASSIN, ANT LION, MADE PRETTY SHORT WORK OF ME LAST TIME."

Story and art by **Kyle Stanley Hunter.** Lettering by **Sean Glenn.** Downer is ©2005 Kyle Stanley Hunter. A **Super Unicorn** production. **www.superunicorn.com**

FWIP
FWIP
URK!
SWZZZZ
"WHAT THE HELL?"
"THEY'RE MAKING SOME KIND OF CREEPER SCRUM!"
THE RETURN OF
NEEDLEMAN


THE
DRAKEBOURN
SANCTUM
Map of Mystery
UPPER LEVEL
Lairs of the
Five Wyrms
Shaft to
Assembly Hall
Hall of the
Dragonlords
Fang
Pillars
Landing Platforms
Mist-shrouded Cliff
Petitioners' Road
LOWER LEVEL
Cave Dwellings
Caves
Tomb
of the
Faithful
Assembly
Hall
Support
Columns
Runic
Archway
Courtyard
Square
Trail to
Deadfall Pass
Service Road
to Dragonport
Mist-shrouded Cliff
50 ft.
Defensive Wall
Landing
Gate
Main Landing
1 square = 50 feet
WEST

The
Hyv



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Savage

Sea

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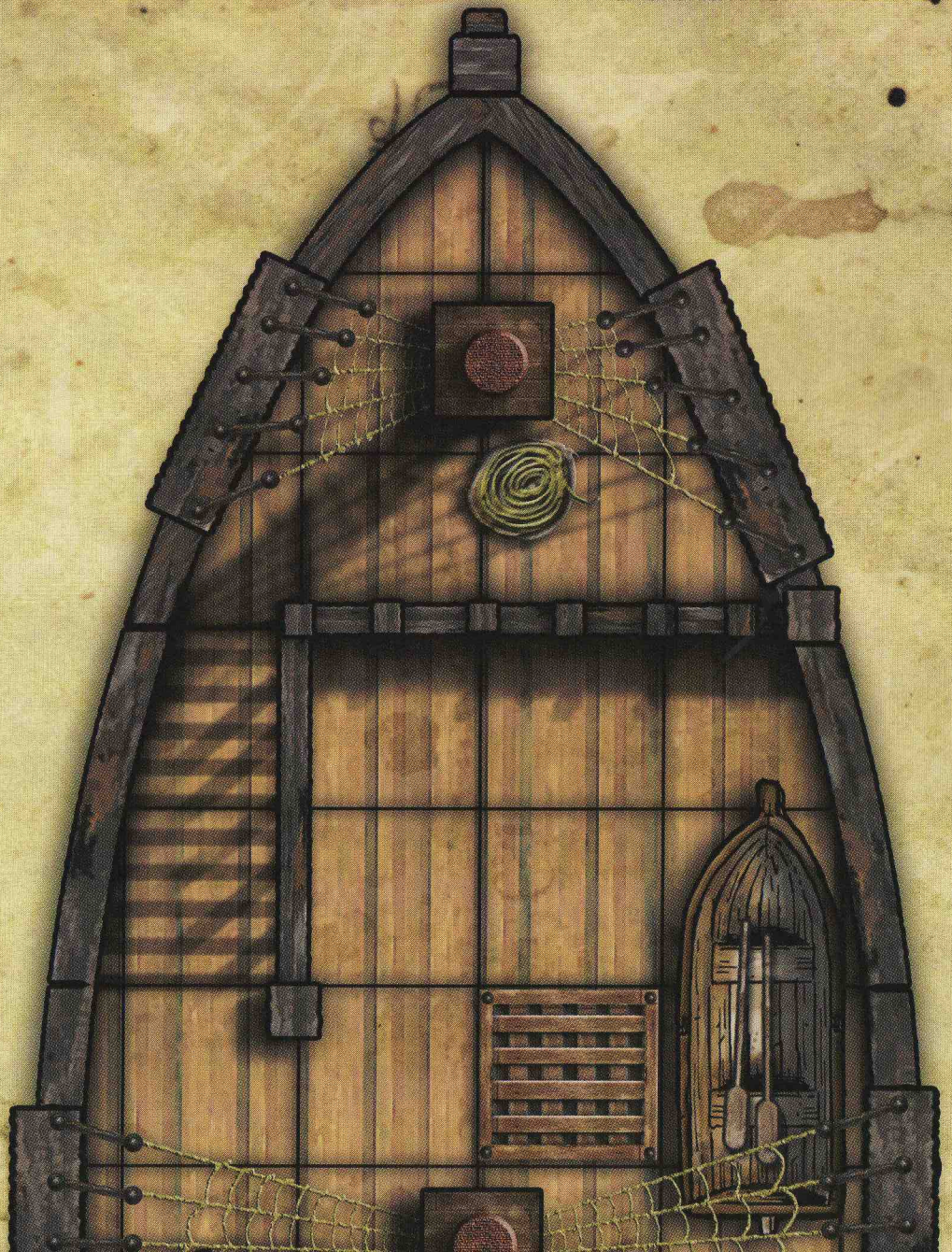

DUNGEON #141

MAP & HANDOUT SUPPLEMENT

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SET SAIL FOR THE SAVAGE TIDE!
DUNGEON
BRAVE THE BEHOLDER'S LAIR!
RETURN TO LOST TAMOACHAN!
SILVER DRAGONS • SEA MONSTERS • PICKLED MEPHITS
MONTE COOK'S DUNGEONCRAFT • DOWNER • MT. ZOGON

Ben Wootten

THE SEA WYVERN'S WAKE

by Richard Pett

It's time to bid farewell to the city of Sasserine as the PCs board the *Sea Wyvern* for a 3,000-mile voyage south into the uncharted waters of the Vohoun Ocean. Their destination: the Isle of Dread. A Savage Tide Adventure Path scenario for 5th-level characters.

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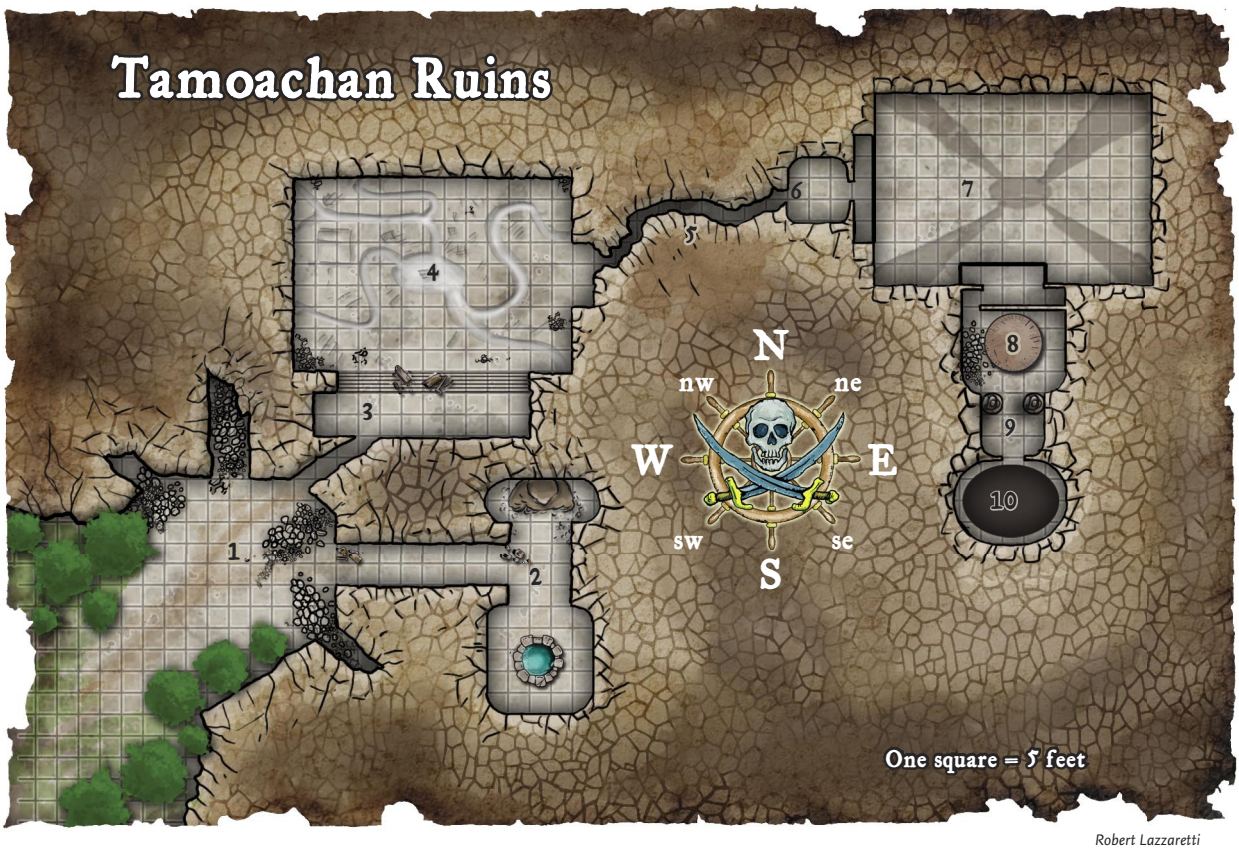

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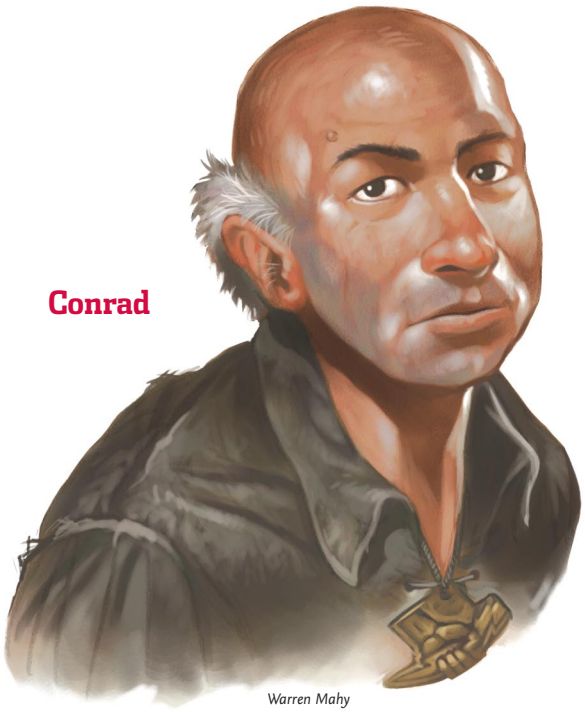
Warren Mahy

Conrad



Warren Mahy

Amella

Warren Mahy

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Urol

Ben Wootten

Skald

Warren Mahy

Avner

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Rowyn

Ben Wootten

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Mother of All

Ben Wootten

Pickled Mephit

Ben Wootten

Lirith

Warren Mahy

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Handout 1

This foul green land is stained with blight. We tried to cut away the weed, but to no avail, and soon had to abandon the tools we had used, their edges dulled to misery.

At noon I ordered Carus and Twaid out onto the weed to explore. How large can such a place be? The crew grow restless.

It is dusk. Efforts to destroy the weed have failed. I have explored what I could, but this is all mists and weed. When will Carus and Twaid return? Despite the calm, the night is not still, and I feel eyes watching me.

The night brought noises but no attack, but I fear for my brothers, I heard cries in the night—was it them? I feel something is alive here, but what can it be? Captain Grough claimed the land had a black heart—maybe Carus and Twaid will have some useful information when they return.

Afternoon. I have decided to find my brothers, and have taken Ranis and Pale with me. They are good brothers, and will aid me as best they can. We shall find the land's black heart.

We headed east, making good headway as only brothers can. By night we had covered many miles but saw nothing but more of the green.

It is night, and I can hear life. Something moves at the edge of sight. Why do they not show themselves? I can hear them whisper one word, over and over, "Outsiders..."

It is afternoon. We have come to a terrible place, a forest of weed grown in mockery of real life, a mire of skeletal ships. How many souls have been lost here? Our supplies grow wan, we must return by the morn to the Rage.

It is dawn, and we have returned to the Rage too late. The crew are gone and the green holds her ever fast. Where have they gone?

I can hear them in the day now. They are outside. They are watching. They want me to join them, but I shall not.

Ranis and Pale are dead. They came through the mist, yet they were not the same. I knew them by the tatters of clothes draped over the green that took their flesh. What wore their bodies has been vanquished, but I know now that these were but the children of what dwells at this land's heart. I must seek the mother at this heart, for to destroy the mother is to destroy the brood. If only I had...

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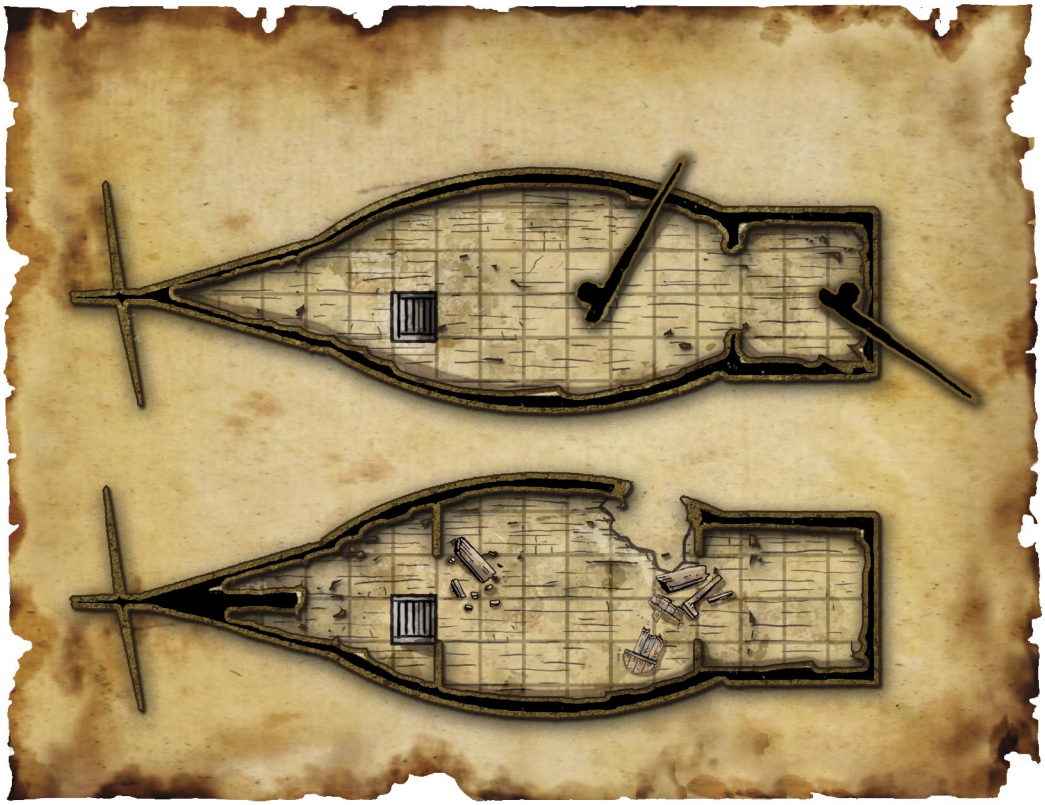

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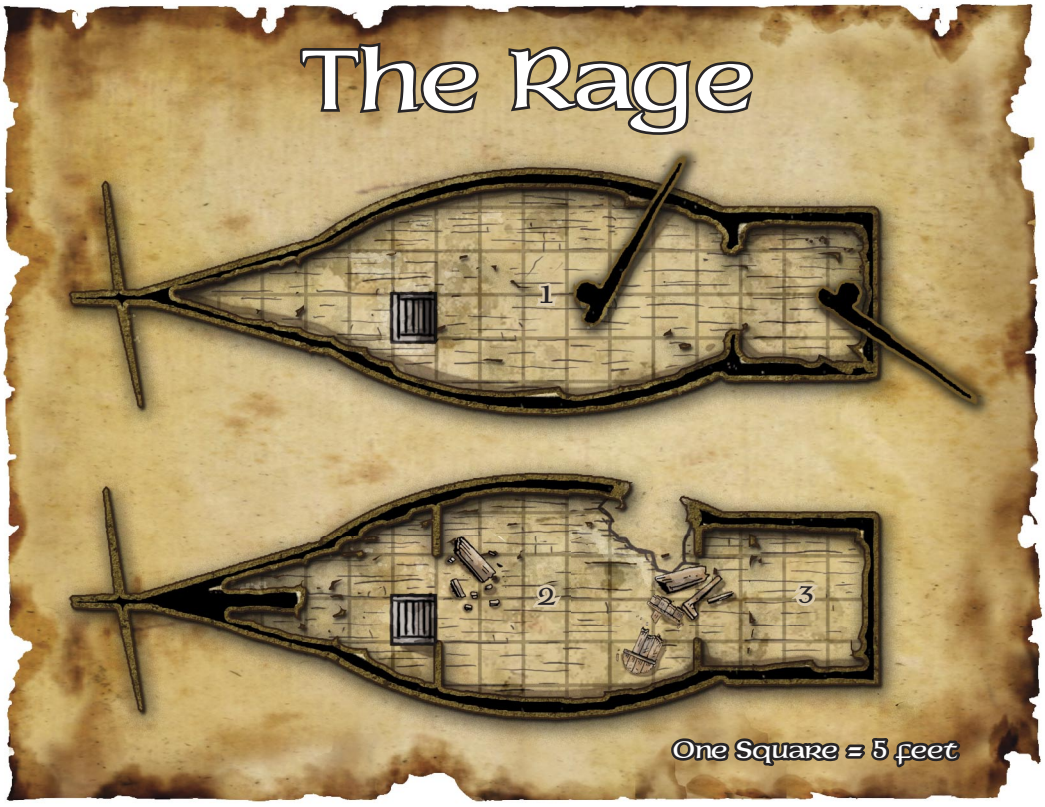

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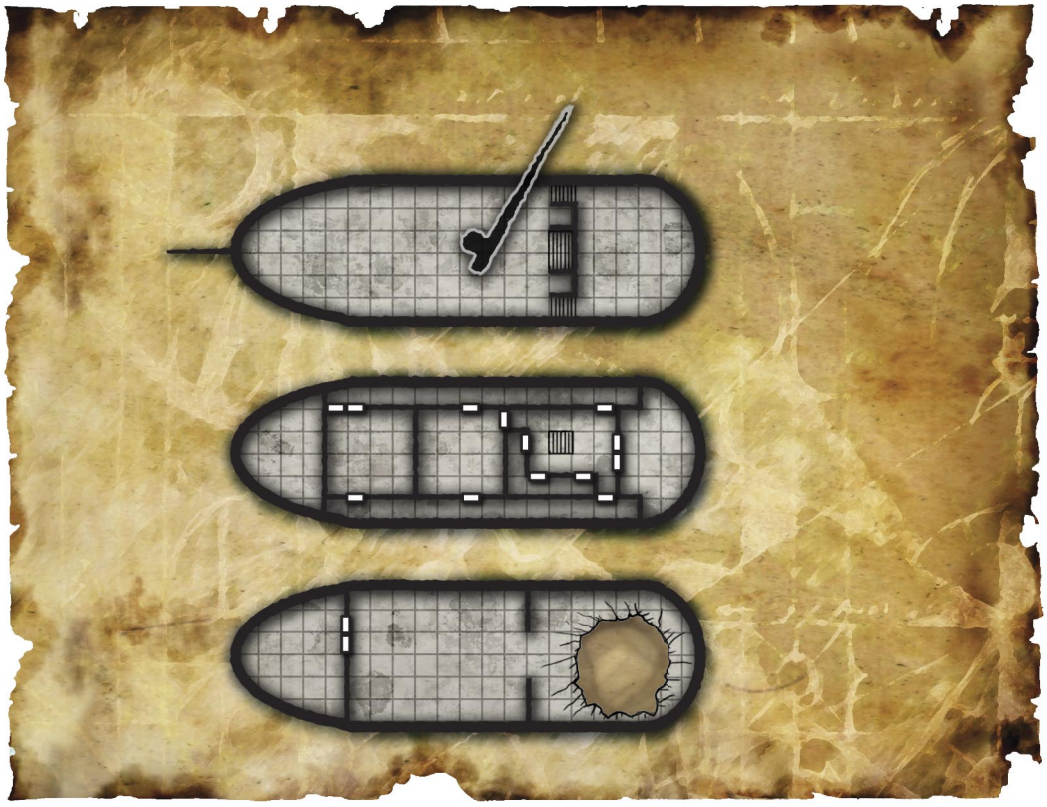

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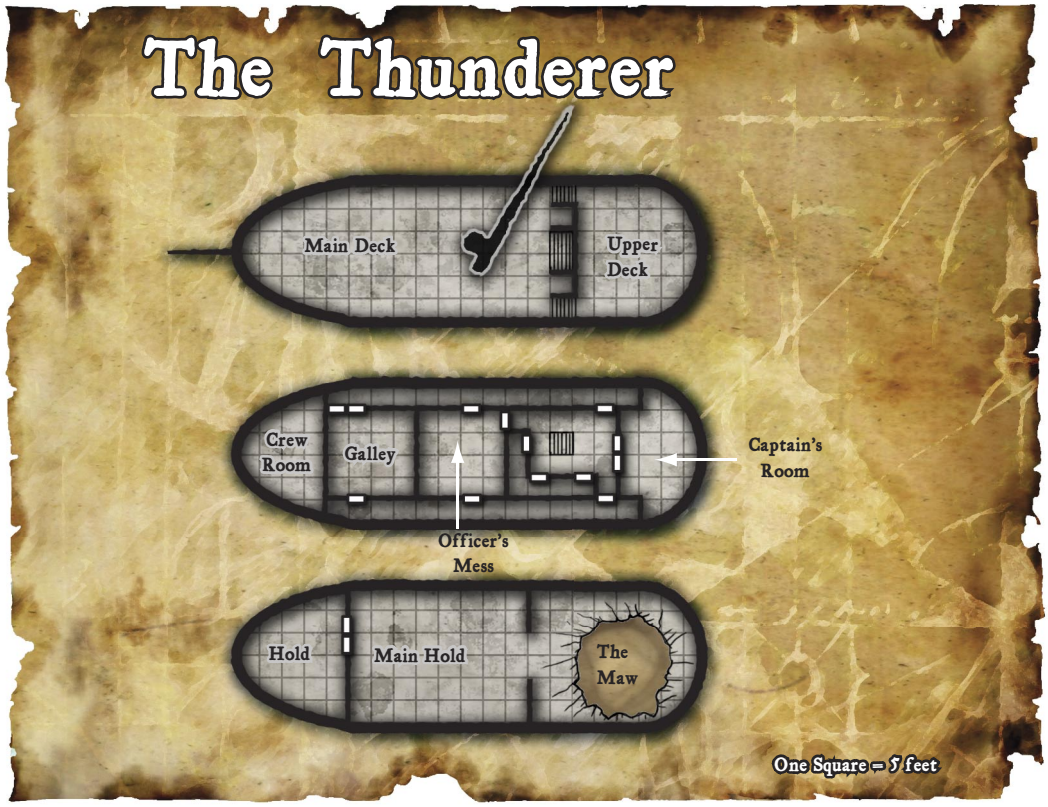

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Jeff Laubenstien

SWORDS OF DRAGONSLAKE

by Nicolas Logue

Scandal has struck the theater circuit of the city of Talantier! Ancient betrayal, murderous plots, and a plethora of suspects plague the PCs as they race to unravel the mystery before its bloody conclusion plays out on the stage. A D&D adventure for 12th-level characters.

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Isadora

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Brengen

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Bartellamus

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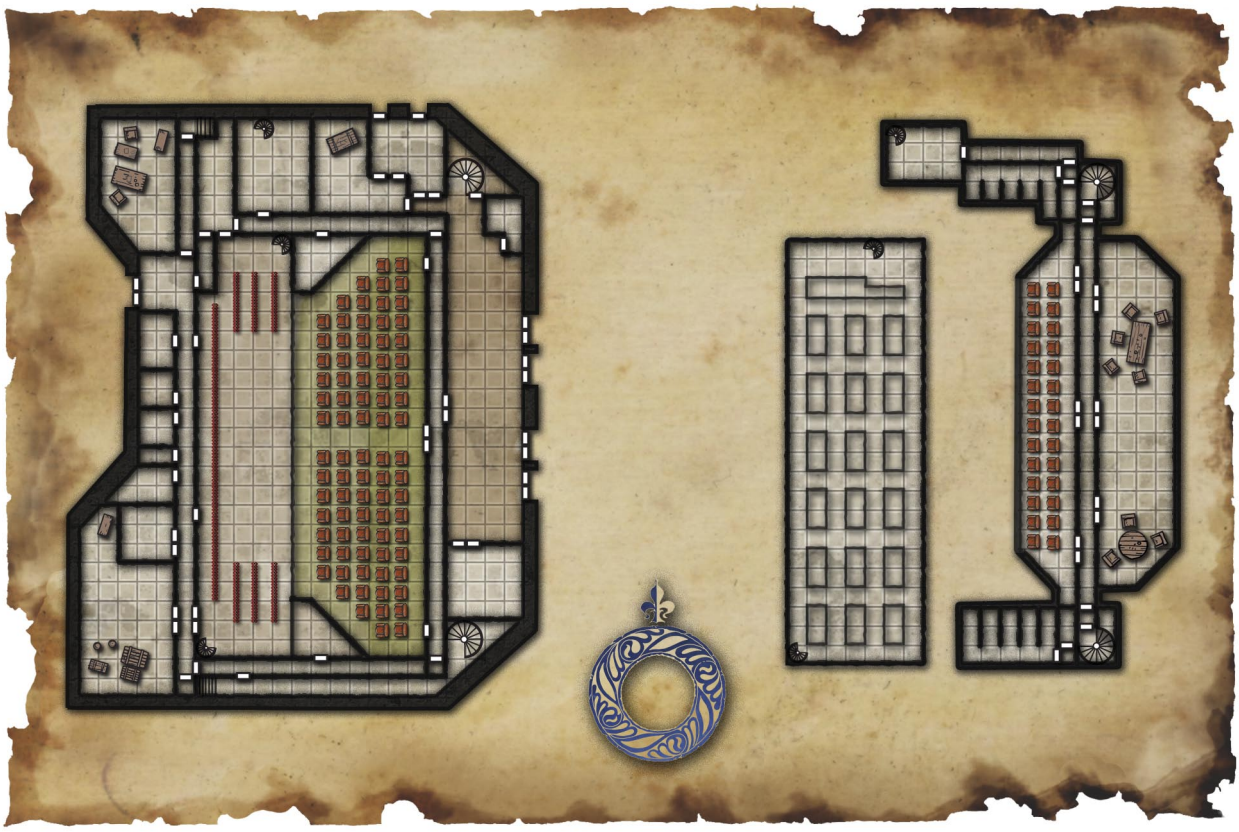

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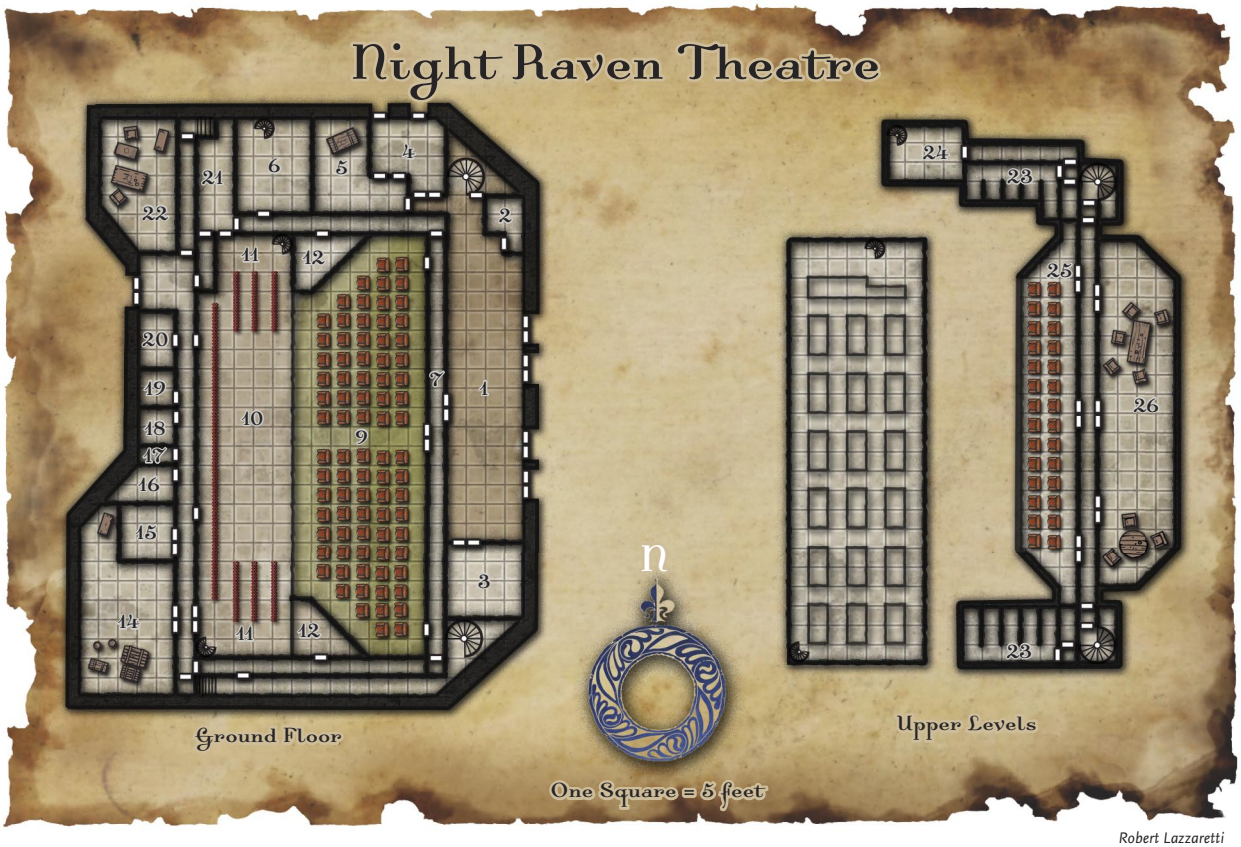

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Garrin

Handout 1

Draxon,
The fools refused to sell. They didn't even look at the gold, just turned me down. I don't know what they see in this crummy part of town anyway, you'd think they'd be smart enough to get out when I gave them the chance. Well, they'll regret crossing me. Do it tonight, make sure there's nothing left of Ye Olde Shadowplay but dust and ashes. But be careful, be sure not to harm the Oshras themselves, I don't want any deaths on my conscience.

DON'T GET CAUGHT!
TS

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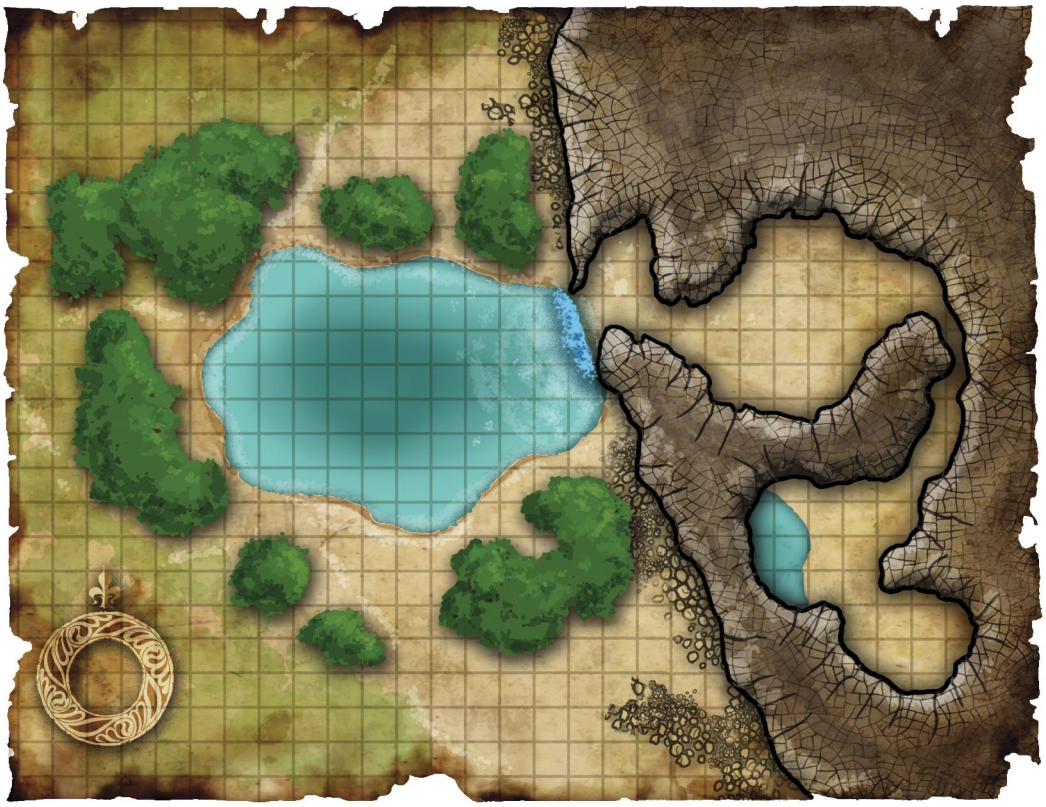

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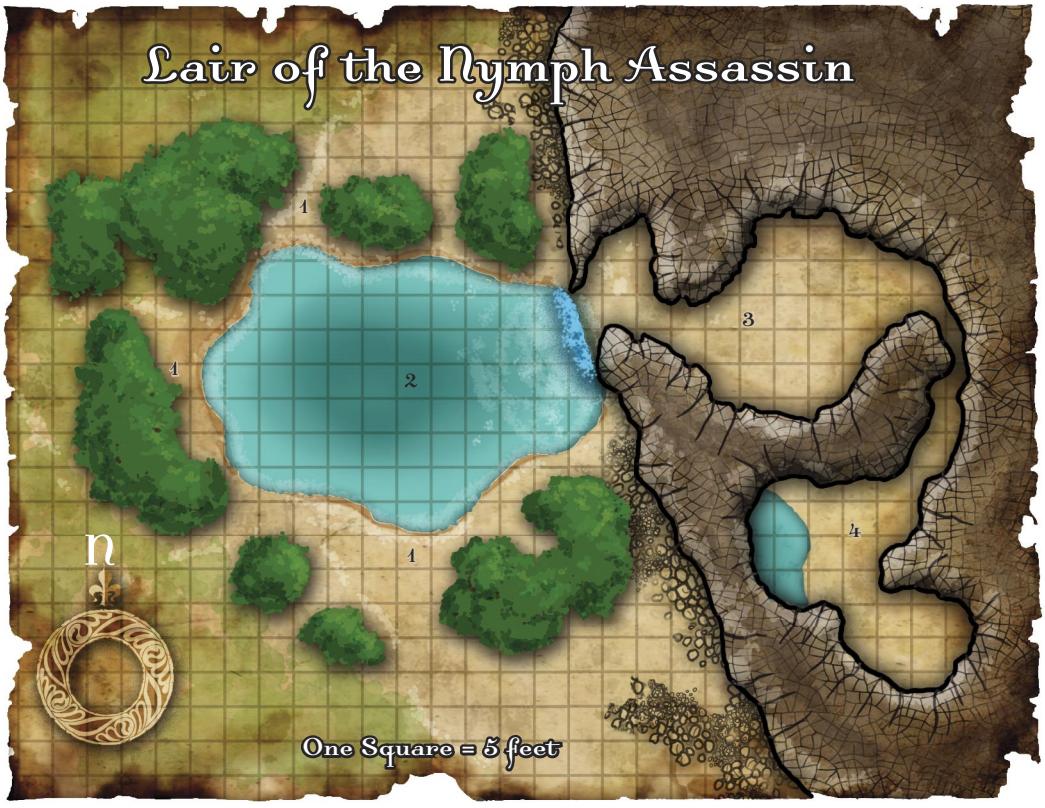

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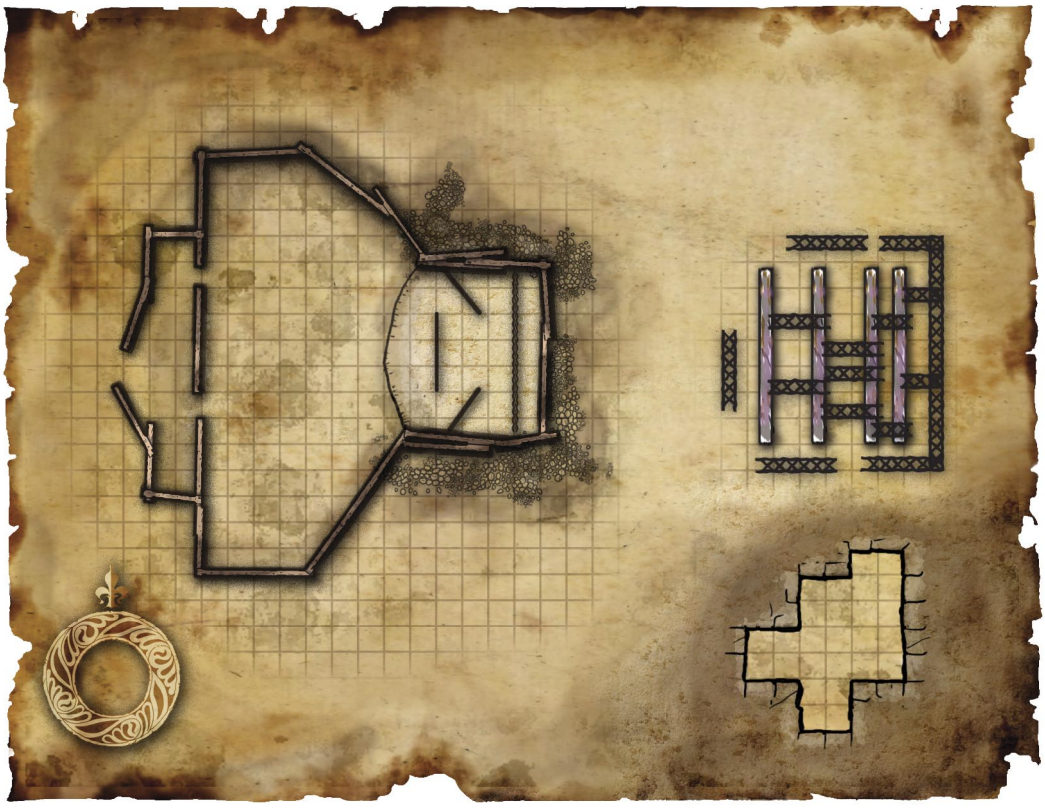

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UDON with Mike Franchina

VLINDARIAN'S VAULT

by Johnathan M. Richards

A missing dragon leads the PCs to a treasure vault hidden deep in the Elemental Plane of Fire, a vault operated by an insane beholder and its fanatical cultists. A D&D adventure for 18th-level characters.

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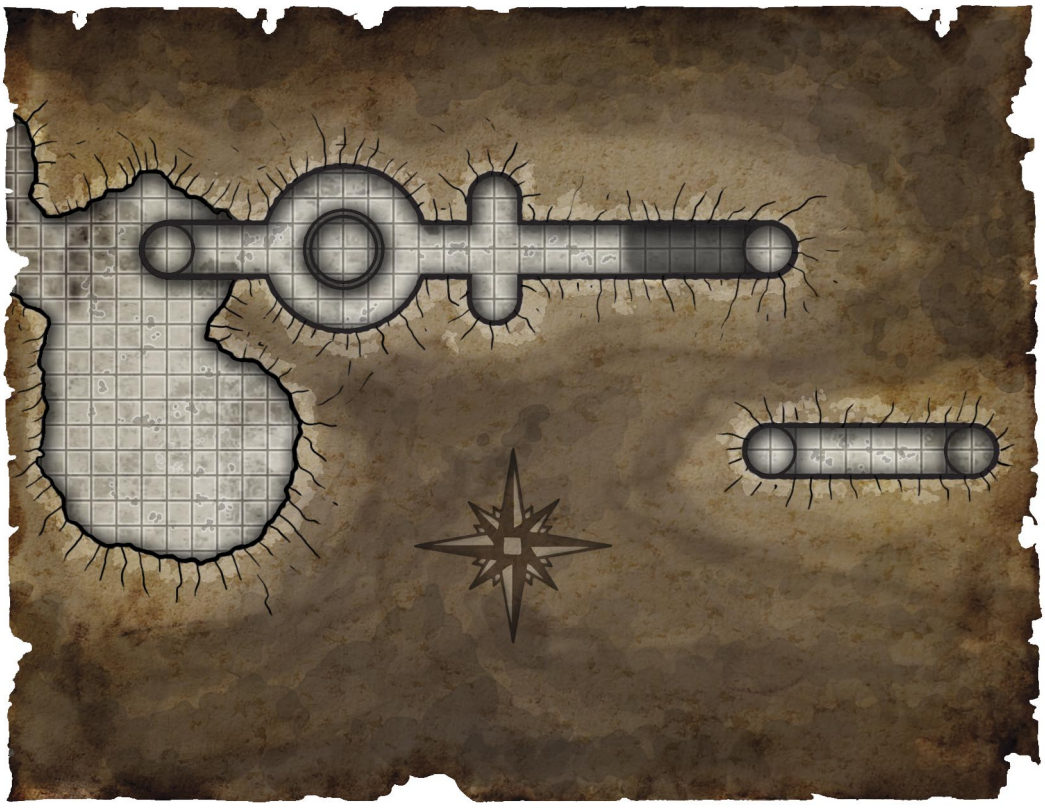

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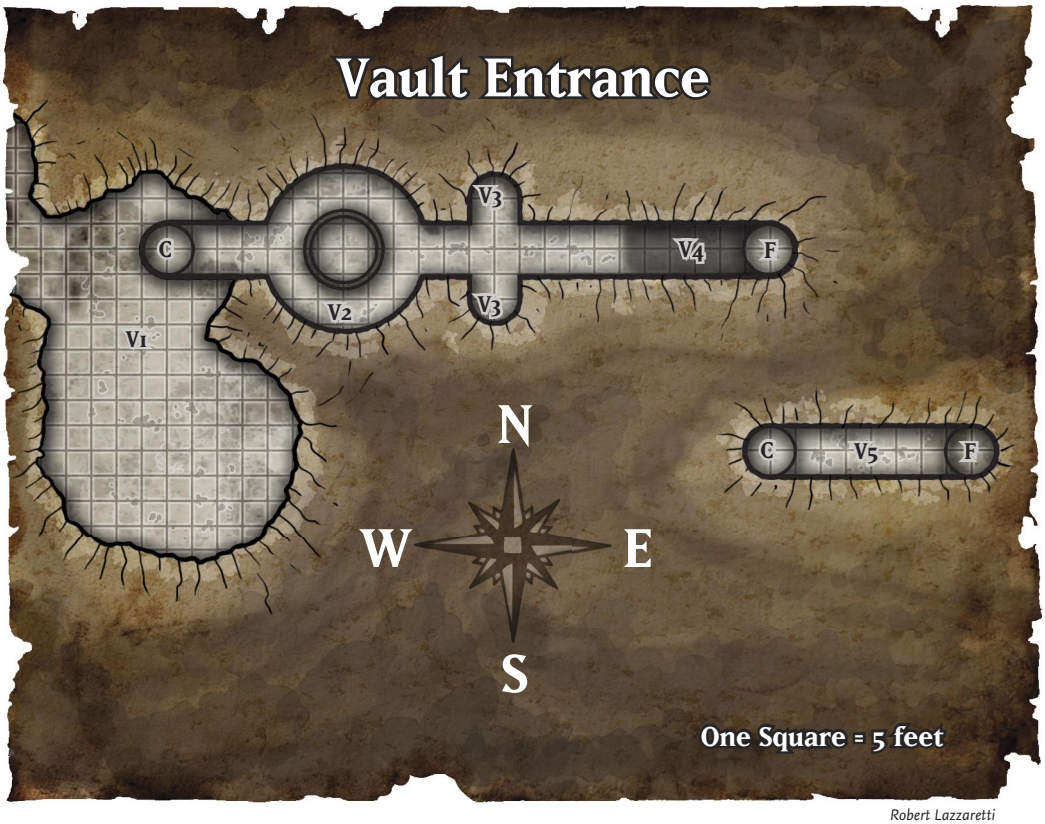

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Tiatyllin

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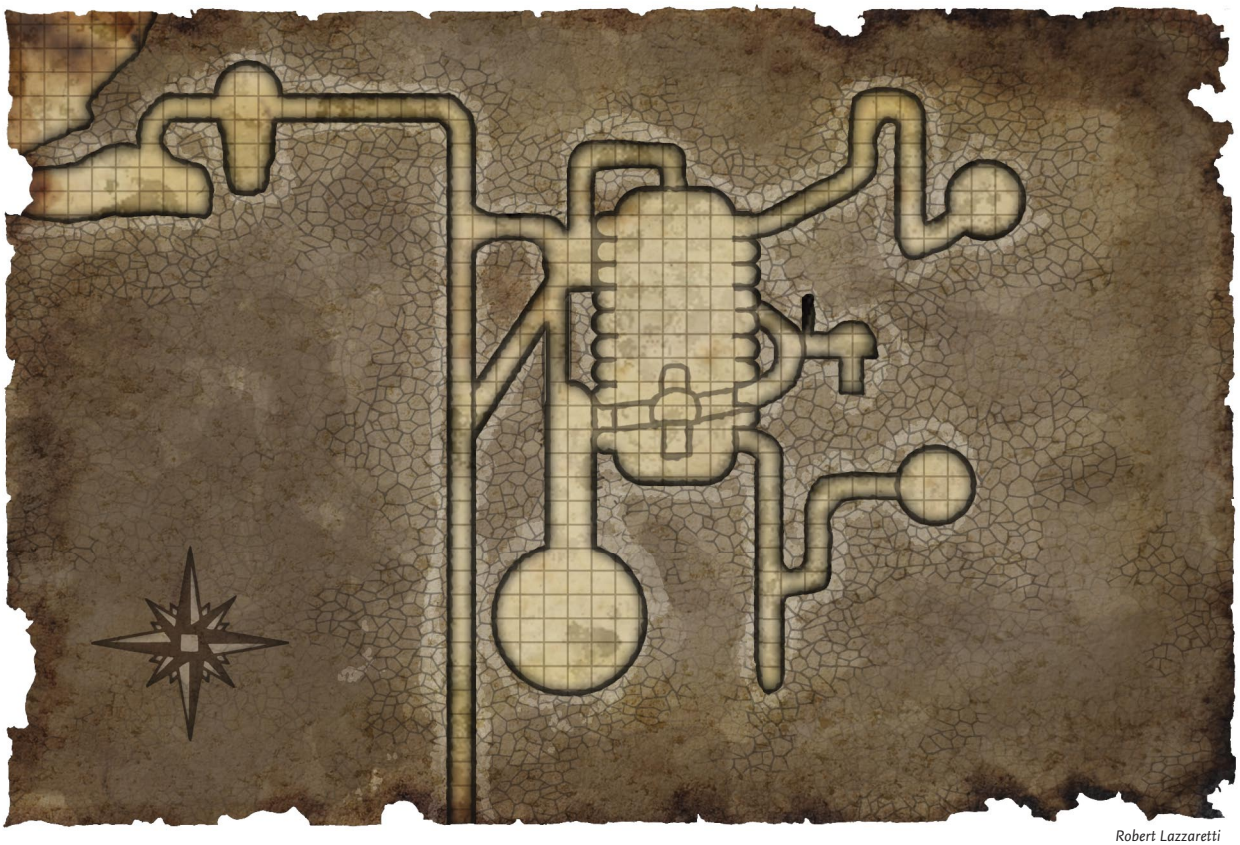

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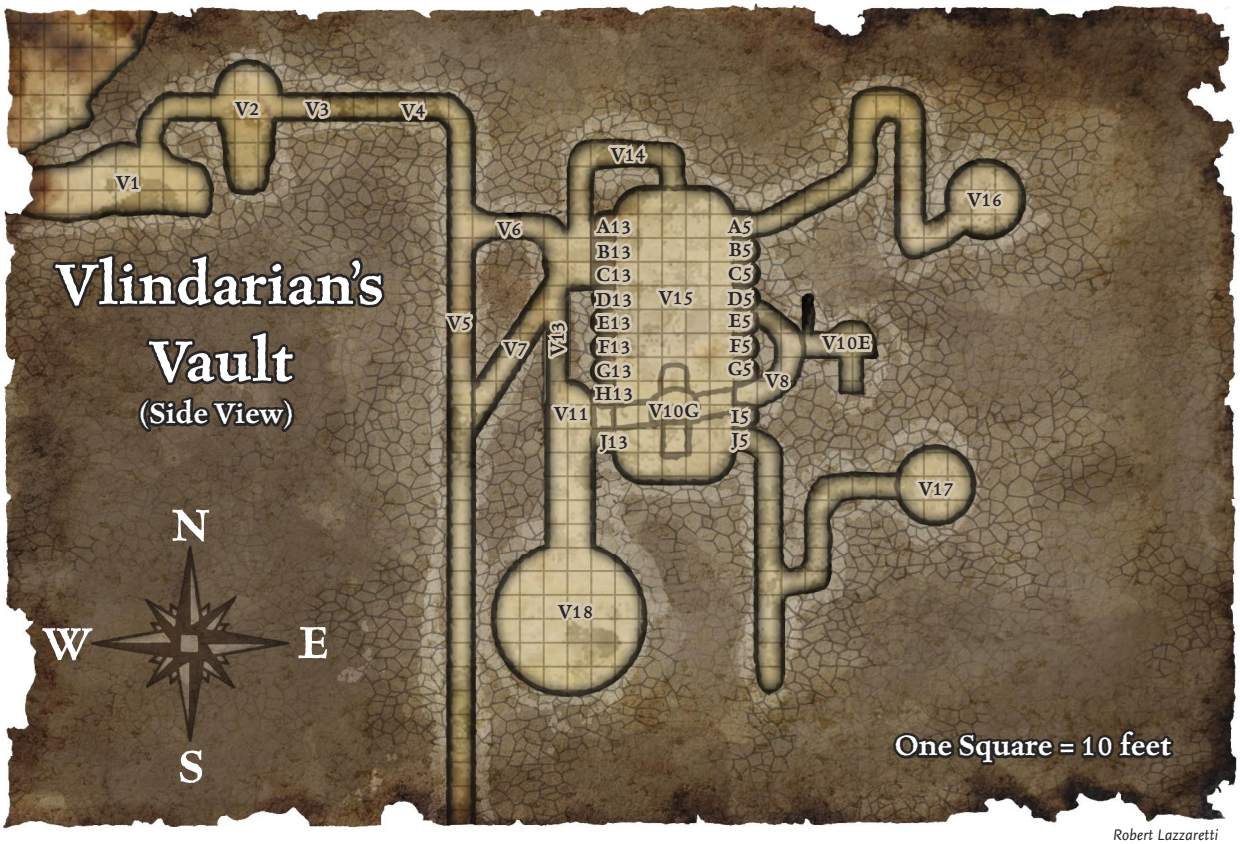

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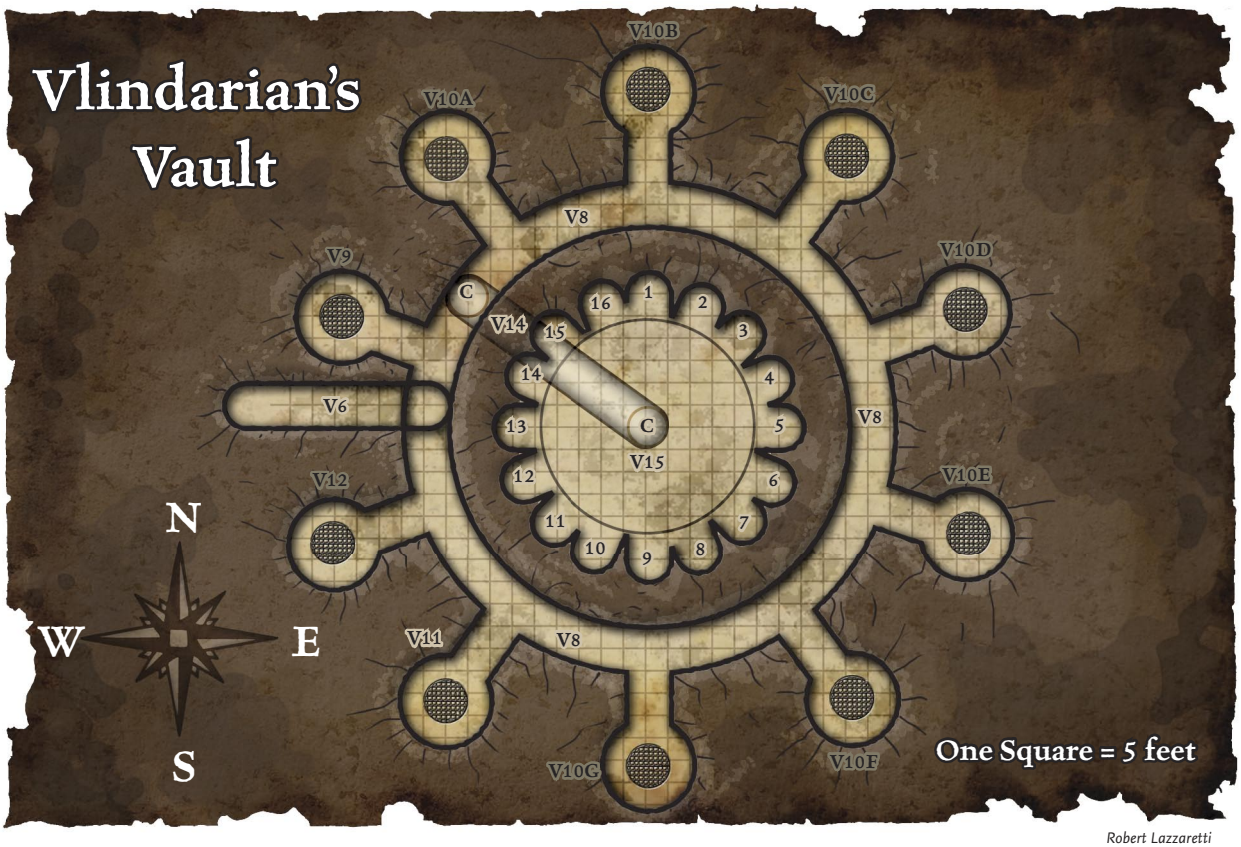

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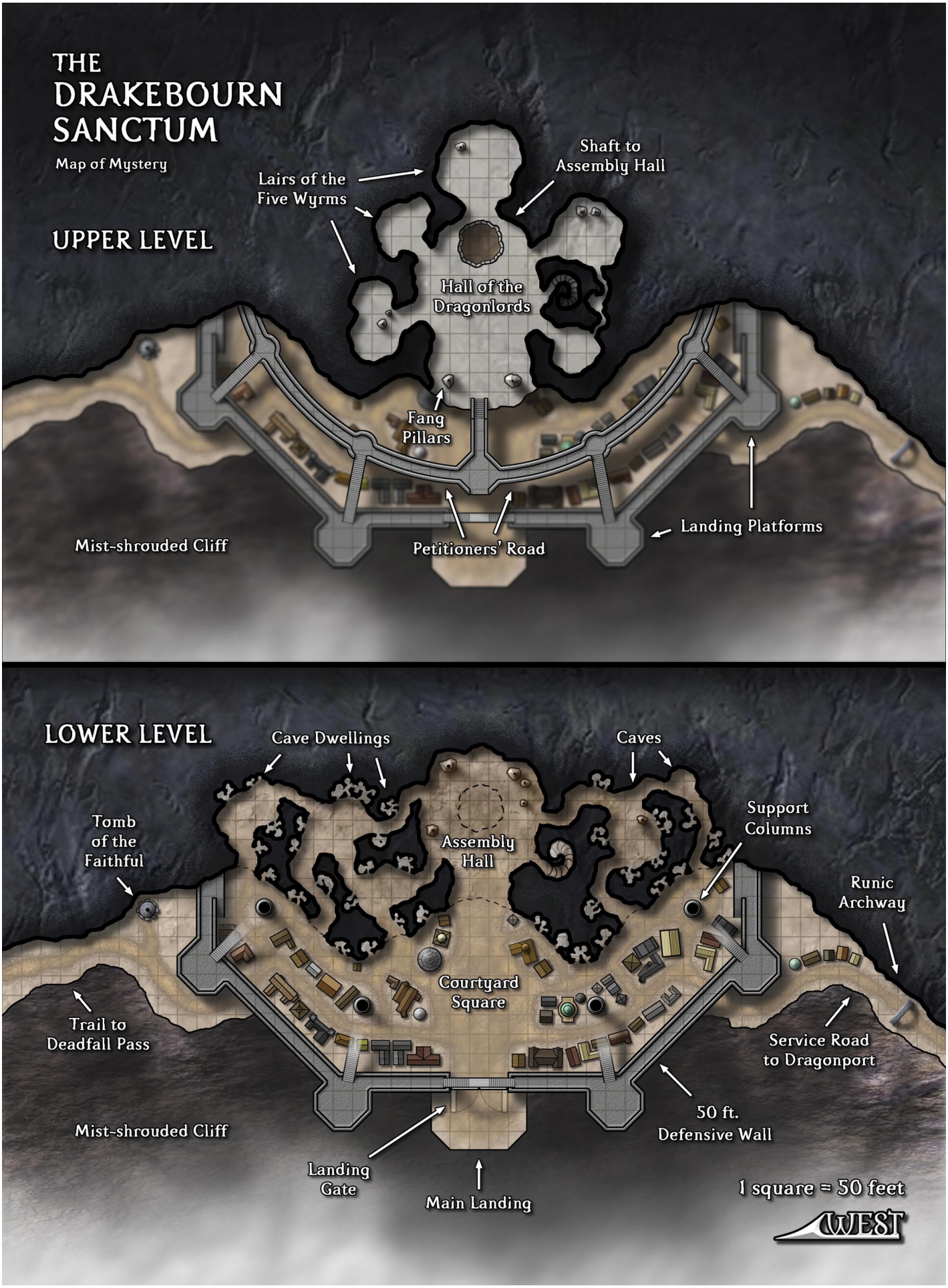

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